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news

DC are abandoning the current 35 cent format, from September cover-dated books on; instead, an extra 8 pages are added, making 40 pages plus covers--as announced in Bem-16, this will mean 25 pages of new story per book. The Dollar Comics continue as before; the 60c titles (JLA, Superboy) go down to this new size, which will sell for 50 cents. The alternative would have been to increase the old-size comics to 40 cents. "There was no way in good conscience we could ask our readers to shoulder a 15% increase," Jenette Kahn says. "By increasing the price our readers will actually pay slightly less per page of comic book story, and certainly less than if we had taken the traditional step of raising our price by five cents."

A number of titles will gain new back-up features. The Human Target, by Len Wein & Dick Giordano, is added to BRAVE & BOLD; Steve Ditko is developing a new feature for SHADE; and Omac, by Jim Starlin & Joe Rubinstein, goes into the back of KAMANDI.

Some books will have three stories, with the lead feature 11 or 12 pages. AQUAMAN will feature Aquaman, Martian Manhunter, and Vigilante; MEN OF WAR will contain Code Name: Gravedigger, Enemy Ace, and a rotating third series, including Captain Fear and Howie Chaykin's Blackhawk three-parter. ACTION will feature Superman, The Atom, and Air Wave.

The series of 60 cent "Specials" is to be discontinued after the Green Lantern issue out in May. FREEDOM FIGHTERS ends with #15, although the Ray will become the second feature in BLACK LIGHTNING. KARATE KID also ends with #15; the character will appear briefly in KAMANDI before rejoining the LSH. SHAZAM finishes with #35, with the feature replacing Wonder Woman in WORLDS FINEST from #253. Also, the "seven times a year" frequency is discontinued, with those books going to bi-monthly.

The October cover-dated ADVENTURE COMICS will be the first Dollar Comic issue, with Wonder Woman (moving from Worlds Finest) by Harris & Estrada, Flash by Bates, Novick & McLaughlin, Green Lantern by O'Neil & Staton, Deadman by Wein & Aparo, a new feature "The Man Called Neverwhere" by McKenzie & Newton, and a rotating final slot featuring 2 or 3-part stories, to begin, probably, with Dr Fate. Superboy moves over into SUPERMAN FAMILY.

A couple of wholly new titles are to be added in June, also. The changes may mean two or three reprint issues appearing--DETECTIVE #477 should feature "The House that Haunted Batman" from #408, by Wein, Wolfman, Adams & Giordano, with three new framing pages by Wein & Marshall Rogers.

It looks as if the dollar "Spectaculars" are going monthly. Out in July is a JONAH HEX SPECTACULAR, with a 30-page Hex tale by Mike Fleisher, and 17-page Scalphunter (by Conway) and Bat Lash (by O'Neil) stories. The June-issued BATMAN SPECTACULAR has two 25-page Batman tales by David V. Reed and Len Wein, plus an illustrated text story written by Denny O'Neil. The April-issued SGT ROCK SPECTACULAR includes the shelved "Panzer" project of a couple of years ago, plus a Rock adventure by Bob Kanigher and Lee Elias.

Another shelved book ought finally to appear somewhere soon -- SANDMAN #7, by Mike Fleisher, Jack Kirby & Mike Royer.

SHOWCASE #100 appears to be missing Cave Carson, Dr Fate & Hourman, B'wana Beast, Nightmaster, G.I. Joe and the Maniaks--but every other star from issues 1-93 is in it, although James Bond has to be incognito!

David Michelinie is writing a 3-parter for JONAH HEX 13-15, while Mike Fleisher finishes his "Encyclopaedia of Super-Heroes" volume on Superman. David is doing a fill-in for DC COMICS PRESENTS ≠3 or ≠4, the "Superman Team-Up" book -- the first issue is to co-star the Flash.

Supergirl and Mary Marvel appear in the SUPERMAN VS SHAZAM tabloid edition, which is by Conway, Buckler & Giordano.

The film tie-in SUPERMAN novel will be published in the U.K. by Arrow in June.

SUPERBOY/LSH ≠240's lead story, "The Man Who Chained the Legionnaires" is drawn by Howie Chaykin & Joe Rubinstein; ≠238 is a special no-ads reprint issue of Adventure 359/360, with a Starlin wraparound cover.

The New Doom Patrol team up in SUPERMAN FAMILY 191-3 with Supergirl, by Conway, Arv Jones & Romeo Tanghal.

Steve Gerber takes over as scripter of CAPTAIN AMERICA ≠221. He's also writing a special issue of AVENGERS, and his LILITH strip for a b & w horror magazine is being drawn by Gene Colan. There's a possibility he may script STAR WARS... issue 11, the first not to be by Thomas/Chaykin, will be by Goodwin, Infantino & Austin.

After March cover-dates, Marvel are to leave the month off their comics covers, to try to give them a longer shelf-life, and to stop late releases from being sent back before they've even been displayed.

More details on Marvel's 1978 Annuals: MARVEL TEAM-UP has Spider-Man joined by the Defenders, by Chris Claremont & John Byrne; THE AVENGERS, by Roger Slifer and Carmine Infantino, brings the Squadron Sinister back; HULK will guest-star Angel and Iceman, by Roger Stern & John Byrne.

Warren's new sf magazine is called 1984; a "topical, concerning what's going on right now" comic magazine is also planned, and a "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" film-book. THE SPIRIT comic magazine is back--≠17 is out now, and ≠18 in February, with wraparound Will Eisner covers and very little advertising. The publisher is not Warren, but Krupp Comic Works; issue 17 includes an Eisner interview, and a Klaus Nordling "Lady Luck" story.

HEAVY METAL has a competitor, GASM; it plans to use some Wrightson covers, and reprint the Strnad/Corben work from FEVER DREAMS. Mike Kaluta may do work for them.

The "Man From Atlantis" & "Logan's Run" TV shows have been cancelled, and the Star Trek series seems to be back to being a feature film? CBS has ordered five more SPIDER-MAN episodes, and one more HULK.

GIANT
60¢
NO. 154
MAY
A DOUBLE-LENGTH CHILLER STARRING THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPER-HEROES!
JUSTICE LEAGUE of AMERICA
YOUR STRUGGLES ARE IN VAIN, JUSTICE LEAGUERS! FOR I AM DOCTOR DESTINY, AND IT'S MY DECREE--
I'LL KILL YOU IN YOUR DREAMS!
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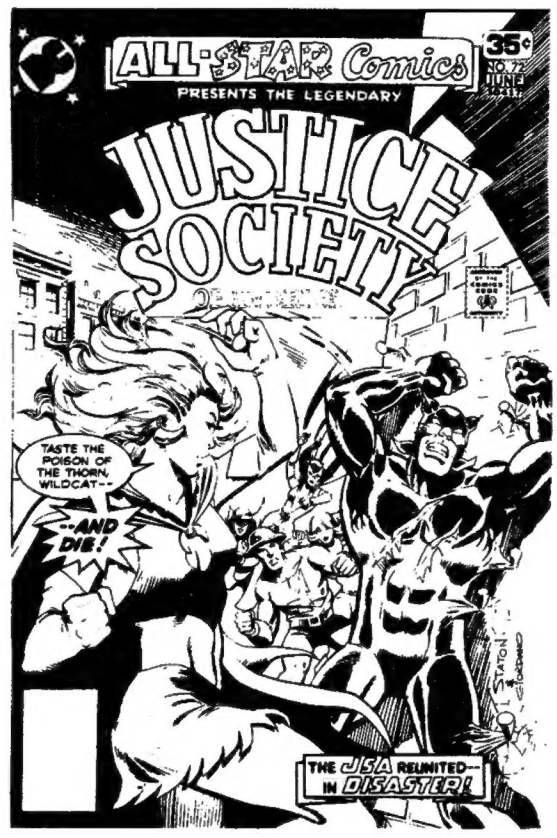

After WHAT IF ≠8, "What If the World Knew That Daredevil Is Blind" by Don Glut & Alan Kupperberg, comes the long-delayed "Conan In the 20th Century" issue (with any luck)--Glut & Kupperberg are preparing also an issue with an Avengers team formed in the '50s, starring Marvel Boy, Venus, & 3-D Man, while "What If Shang-Chi was on Fu Manchu's Side" is also in the works.

George Perez leaves AVENGERS with ≠171 --he will work on special projects like the BEATLES issue of MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL.

A tenth issue of RAMPAGING HULK may be released, depending on the ratings of the second HULK TV movie. THE HUMAN FLY, in addition to daredevil stunts, is now a rock singer, both in his comic (from ≠11) and in real life. Now that takes courage!

A DEFENDERS issue of the Marvel Treasury series is being prepared, including the non-team's origin, Valkyrie's origin, and the introduction of Nighthawk.

The re-vamped MS MARVEL will be battling Mosquito, the Avions, and the (all-new) Warhawk in future issues, from Claremont and Cockrum.

Fan artist Kerry Gamill is drawing an AVENGERS issue, written by Tom DeFalco.

The SILVER SURFER book by Lee, Kirby & Sinnott should be published by Simon and Schuster in early spring; the next in the "Origins" series, featuring classic Marvel battles, follows soon after. The sixth in the series will be devoted to the Hulk's early adventures; following 1978's Spider-Man calendar, the 1979 Marvel Calendar is to feature the Hulk.

Al Weiss may become the new JOHN CARTER artist, if he and Marvel can agree terms; Gil Kane is becoming too busy with his STAR HAWKS newspaper strip, written by Ron Goulart. Ricardo Villamonte is to draw a Jim Shooter-scripted HERCULES story, and may also draw an issue of JOHN CARTER.

Chris Claremont & John Byrne are to do a two-part Dr Strange/Satanna team-up for next Halloween. Byrne is also working on a special issue of DR STRANGE from a plot by Ralph Macchio--Frank Brunner is doing some covers for the book. The next Marvel-based TV show may well be a plain-clothed version of Dr Strange.

A new multi-purpose fill-in issue has been scripted by Gary Friedrich--it could appear in DAREDEVIL, SPIDER-MAN, MARVEL TEAM-UP, or, presumably, PETER PARKER.

From issue ≠50 of 2000 A.D., Walter, Judge Dwedd's loyal wobot, gains his own 1-page strip; the first two instalments are drawn by Ian Gibson, and then Brian Bolland takes over, and the strip takes up the colour back cover spot--and in that issue Walter meets his long-lost brother! The series is written by Joe Collins.

The "Invasion" series concludes in prog 51, replaced initially by "Colony Earth", a series on UFOs in about six parts both written & drawn by Jim Watson. Issue 51 also includes "Any Old Iron", a Future-Shock by Richard Burton and Trev Goring, while in ≠52 comes "Solo Flip" by Chris Lowder & Brian Bolland. Prog 52 also sees a new writer on Dan Dare, Jack Adrian, and a new story, even! MACH-1 re-starts after a 6-issue rest in issue 53, and the series soon begins to take a startling turn...

The contents of the 2000 A.D. Summer Special has not been finalised yet, but it will include a MACH-1 story by Mike Lake & Trev Goring, a Judge Dredd tale written & drawn by Brendan McCarthy, a Dan Dare adventure drawn by Gary Leach, and a cover by Kev O'Neill, who also contributes a MACH-0 story. -ML

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES of

CAPTAIN FROG

LAST ISSUE CAPTAIN FROG, ASTEROID AND PAIRABOLIX ESCAPED FROM A PRISON IN ANCIENT BRITAIN ONLY TO FIND THEMSELVES IN A ROMAN ARENA CONFRONTING THE DEADLY RASTUS AUGUSTUS- BLACK CAESAR!

CAUTIOUSLY OUR HERO MAKES A FURTIVE ATTEMPT AT EVASIVE ACTION!

EH BIEN! WHAT A MERVEILLEUX OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN TOP MARKS AT MY NEXT ARCHAEOLOGY EVENING CLASS!

ZAT IS STRANGE! I COULD SWEAR I CAN 'EAR 'EAVY BREATHING IN ZIS TUNNEL

I DON'T RECALL ZE 'ISTORY BOOKS SAYING ANYSING ABOUT ZAT!

AT LEAST... NOT ZE OFFICIAL ONES!

ELSEWHERE QUEEN BODICE IS PLOTTING REVOLT...

IT'S NO GOOD MEN - WE CAN'T AFFORD TO PAY THESE WOPS' PROTECTION MONEY ANY LONGER!

WHY, LAST NIGHT I COULDN'T GET TO SLEEP FOR ALL THE RAPING AND PILLAGING GOING ON! HEAVEN KNOWS WHAT IT WAS LIKE FOR THE NEIGHBOURS!

ZUT ALORS! WHAT A RIDICULEUSE PLACE TO LEAVE A LION UNATTENDED! SOMEONE COULD GET 'URT

BOLDLY OUR HERO LEAPS ACROSS THE ARENA FLOOR! UNMINDFUL OF HIS OWN DANGER (OR THE DIRECTION HE IS TRAVELLING IN) HE HURLS HIMSELF IN FRONT OF ASTEROID AND PAIRABOLIX!

I DON'T MIND TELLING YOU - I'VE HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH THESE ROMANS — FREQUENTLY!

WE BRITISH SHOULD SHOW THOSE EYETIES THAT WE CAN BE JUST AS EXPLOITATIVE, INCURSIVE AND AGGRESSIVE AS THEY ARE!

BACK IN THE ARENA CAPTAIN FROG IS KEEPING BLACK CAESAR AT BAY WITH HIS GARLIC-POWERED HYPER-BREATH!

BUT...

GASP! I'M RUNNING... OUT OF... BREATH!

MON DIEU! AM I TO MEET MY WATERLOO HERE IN THIS DUSTY ARENA OF DEATH?

A SUIVRE (NATURELLEMENT)

FAN-THINGS

1977 -- not a good year for fandom, I'd say. Howard Stangroom's over-ambitious YANCEY STREET JOURNAL failed, and now even his plans to continue it as COMIXINE have come to nought—he's had to sell his comic collection to get together enough money to give refunds to subscribers. If you're a YSJ subscriber, and haven't heard from Howard yet, I'd suggest sending him an s.a.e. and a note of how many issues you are owed.

On the subject of refunds, KIDZ STUFF ≠2 has been so long delayed that Hunter Tremayne is willing to return money,

and again a stamped addressed envelope would be appreciated. However, Hunter is by no means giving up his publishing activities -- when issue 2 of Kidz Stuff does appear in a few months, it ought to be around 60 pages long! He also expects to revive Andy Johnson's NEW CARTOON REVIEW, and even perhaps take over the publishing of PANELOLOGIST, to enable George Barnett to concentrate more on the

production of Panny. If that means more issues per annum, it would be worthwhile.

Besides YSJ, two top-flight fanzines breathed their last in 1977; TBS, which was suffering from terminal lateness anyway, and FANTASY TRADER. But they live on in Panelologist and Bem, of course--more worrying is the decline in frequency of COMICS UNLIMITED, which at one time could publish twelve issues in a year. In 1977, it only managed half that number. CU is one of the "big five" British fanzines, along with Panny, Bem, CMN and F/A, so it would really be a set-back if it was to disappear.

The danger with any fanzine is that it relies almost entirely on one person--the editor. Besides being a comics collector and fan, he's got an extra hobby; making fanzines. It's an expensive hobby, and a time-consuming one--I know Martin reckons on a solid month of evenings & week-ends to put together a Bem, designing, laying out, and typing, while the collation takes a few more evenings. George is a bit more speedy, I gather--but he can get by with rather less sleep than average! If the editor loses interest or enthusiasm, or has a sudden attack of sanity, the zine's days may be numbered. Unless of course a new sucker--oops, I mean editor -- can be found. The F/A change-overs have worked, and that magazine is the longest-running British fanzine--it looks as if the THING change-over failed, as no sign of that zine has been seen for a long time.

Fanzine editors are a rare breed among fans, a veritable freak of nature --and ones who actually do publish their zines with a degree of regularity ought to be pampered. So, buy their comics, subscribe to their fanzines, buy them a drink or offer them a sandwich--if half-a-dozen of them decided to get away from it all, fandom would take years to recover.

Now that I've got that off my chest, and talked myself into buying Martin a lager next time he sees me, let's move on to the more regular business.

I was all set to tell you about ASTRON ≠1 (such as the smashing Brian Lewis cover featuring Artoo-Detoo and a 93% naked young lady, and the forecasts of the next decade for comics by the editors of CMN and Bem), but co-editor Steve Green tells us he's sold out! Issue 2 24p from Steve at 'Ad Astra',

should come out soon, though, with more pages (thus overcoming the thinness that was my only major criticism of ≠1), interviews with Harry Harrison and Harvey Kurtzman, reviews, and a look to SF's future, plus "Reality Plus", Steve's column on fanzines & fandom. If you've got a zine or information you'd like him to mention, get in touch with him. But don't forget a little column called "Fan-Things"-- you can reach me via the Bem editorial address.

But, time for a review of BARAGRIN ≠1 -- yes, the first Fantasy Unlimited comic, complete with a full colour cover, is now out, at 35p plus postage from editor Alan Austin

--45p should cover it, I guess. Patrick Marcel and Jean-Daniel Breque have been producing fine one-page "Baragrin" strips for CU for over a year now -- and in this book they really let loose! I prefer the two shorter stories here, "Mind Machine" and "Hamlet", to the longer "Of Gorillas and Hares" at the moment--but they're all funny, and nice to look at too! I highly recommend this comic, and strongly suggest you send off for it.

Another stripzine to come my way of late is PHOBOS ≠1, available at 40p from Trevor Hughes.

It's in the old ZEPHYR format, and even includes a free Zephyr badge (but then, Trev has been trying to get rid of 'em for years now). This is more of an underground comic, really, than a fanzine, and even boasts a 5-page Hunt Emerson strip; if you like this sort of thing, this is what you like.

WORLDS-7 10p from Mark Finch,

is a special Christmassy issue, with film, comic, and book news, plus various picture features, cartoons, and tiny strips of varying interest or hilarity. But at 3p plus postage, it's well worth it.

MEDIA ≠4 arrived punctually 18p from Mark Ellis,

in December-- well, actually Mark has had to skip a month, but he's really doing well, and a six-issue subscription (£1) would seem to be a good investment. Inside the Star Wars cover are 15 pages of ads, plus the Graeme Bassett Patter Page (in Bem he's edited--pure uncensored Bassett has to be seen to be appreciated), news, and Mark's customary three editorials this time--it looks as if this adzine is well on its way to becoming the place to advertise comics for sale. It's amazing what a good regular schedule and persistence will do.

The first mailing of the new apa Phil Greenaway

should have gone out by the time you read this -- but I'm told there's still room for a few more members. So, get in touch with Phil, if you want to join in -- it's certainly the best way to start a career in fanzine publishing. If you'd like a copy of EM-1, Martin Lock's apazine, just send a 7p stamp to the Bem address; be careful to

specify which zine you want, otherwise you could end up with almost anything! For example, news of BATMANIA ≠23, which he's expecting from Rich Morrissey (the U.S. dock strike has delayed the package a couple of months), or details of The Comic Heroines Fan Club, which he's U.K. Agent for. So, Em-1, info on Batmania, or details on the CHFC -- whatever you want, just send Martin a 7p stamp. Quite the information centre, isn't he?

Rob Barrow's got an ad in this issue somewhere for his various comic marts and marketplaces -- furthermore, Comicon 78, at the same hotel as last year, is fixed for July 29th and 30th, with a second con due in Birmingham a month or so later. It all sounds interesting; I'll hope to keep you informed on progress. Sadly, the date of Mike Conroy's second "New Original Comic Mart" at the Royal Horticultural Society's Old Hall in Victoria isn't known yet -- he's waiting until after the first mart under his supervision (on Sunday 22 January) before deciding whether the marts can continue on a bimonthly schedule, or lapse to quarterly. Are times that tough in the comics-selling biz? Stay tuned!

Well, I began by saying that 1977 was not a good year for fandom; it certainly had more than its share of disappointments over the months. I hope 1978 works out better -- but that depends on you, rather than me, Colin, Mike, Richard, George, Alan, Martin, Hunter, or Bram! ?ED SALLIS

RICH MORRISSEY'S AMERICA

When Jack Kirby sits down to write a story, he does very little research. As has often been observed, he has an almost limitless imagination--his mind seems to be bursting with new characters, concepts, and ideas in general. And, make no mistake, many of his ideas are as brilliant as they ever were--the concepts of a hidden society of mental patients who are somehow able to teleport themselves to a tiny world in another dimension, or a planet only a few yards wide whose entire history has been influenced by Earth movies, are unmatched as far as sheer originality is concerned in the field of comics. And yet, today at least, he rarely uses any of his ideas to anything like its full potential -- when Captain America and the Falcon track those madmen to their dimensional refuge, all they find awaiting them are boring monsters, and, no sooner is the mind-staggering Uni-Mind introduced in the Eternals title than it's shunted off to one side, to be replaced by such original concepts as the Cosmic-Powered Hulk.

When E. Nelson Bridwell sits down to write a story, he does a great deal of research -- he plunges into his memory or his collection, and looks for some past hook on which to hang a new story. When assigned to write a Captain Marvel story he will remember, say, Black Adam ("An excellent villain, if I can only find a way to revive him!"), an old story in which Dr Sivana revived Attila the Hun ("Say, <u>that</u>'s how I can revive him!"), and some apparent loose end to tie up ("If Black Adam was given his powers 5000 years ago, how could he get the powers of later men like Solomon, Hercules, & Achilles?") --and write a story tying all those ideas together. Bridwell handles ideas better, and far more consistently, than Kirby--but his characters and concepts are almost always originated by earlier writers.

Jack Kirby and E. Nelson Bridwell are perhaps the purest examples of the two major influences in comic book writing: the creative and the analytical styles, for want of a better term. Neither, of course, is an absolutely pure example--Kirby <u>does</u> bring back established characters on occasion (usually his own, but occasionally other people's), just as E. N.B. sometimes <u>does</u> create new characters (the foreign super-heroes in Super Friends 7-9, for example). Nevertheless, Kirby is probably the most inspired creator in the business, and Bridwell the most consistent analyst -- and, interestingly, neither is generally considered to be among the better writers in the field. Too much creativity and too little analysis, as typified by Kirby's current work, results in a boring story in which the full potential of a brilliant idea is rarely explored -- but too much Bridwell-type reliance on past ideas can quickly result in a dearth of present-day innovation.

For this reason, the most acclaimed writers in the field have been those who combine elements of both the Bridwell & Kirby styles -- people with the ability to create new and original plots and characters, but with interest enough in continuity to keep the story consistent with what has already been established. Most of the great writers of the past--Gardner Fox, Carl Barks, John Broome, Will Eisner, Bill Finger and numerous others--have been of this type. Finger, for example, co-created Batman and most of the other characters in the strip, and constantly came up with new plots for them -- and yet continued to bring back favourite villains like The Joker in new circumstances, and managed to maintain an unusually tight continuity over the years.

High quality has also been achieved when two people leaning toward opposite extremes have worked together--notably in the case of Kirby's work with Stan Lee, who was much more of a Bridwell type than most of the DC writers of his day. Stan might come up with the original idea ("Say, why don't we explain why this happened 8 issues ago?"), but Jack would introduce his own original concepts ("Fine! Why don't we do this with it--and I think this character I just thought up would fit in perfectly!"). Working with Kirby, or Steve Ditko, Lee would provide the continuity, believability and ties to the real world the solo work of both men often lacks, while Jack and Steve provided most of the basic ideas. Some fine work was produced in this manner, but it depended on input from both men--and, unfortunately, personal differences (largely Stan's tendency to claim somewhat more of the credit than actually belonged to him) led to Kirby's refusal to work in this manner with Lee or anyone else, and Ditko's refusal to do any more work for Marvel in <u>any</u> capacity.

But it's no coincidence that, while Jack Kirby was one of the first people to produce original material for comics, E. Nelson Bridwell was the first of a second generation of comics professionals--those recruited from comic fandom. With few exceptions, most of the current breed of writers leans far more toward the Bridwell end of the spectrum than did the first generation--and, as a result, ideas seem to be in somewhat shorter supply now than they once were.

Possibly this has to do with the composition of fandom, and the way in which people tend to get into it. Most of the original writers and artists were imaginative people with fantasies of their own, who often wrote stories for their own pleasure and that of friends before they attempted to enter the field. There are still many people of this sort in present day fandom -- but others, and I include myself in this latter category, seem to spend more time talking <u>about</u> comics--in criticising existing comics and pointing out inconsistencies. Some, again including myself, began by having LoCs published in the letter columns (a comparatively recent innovation that's often credited with a major role in the development of fandom as we know it today). Such people, accustomed to discussing stories critically and thinking about how <u>they</u> might do better if they had the chance, tend to rely far more on past continuity than did their predecessors -- and still newer fans tend to applaud their efforts, elated at the fact that the writers actually remember points that had seemed long-forgotten. But <u>new</u> ideas, of the sort that Gardner Fox and his contemporaries used as a matter of course, don't seem to come as easily to them...

This trend is most evident with regard to villains. The long-running Marvel books like FANTASTIC FOUR and SPIDER-MAN were rich in new and different characters when Kirby and Ditko were working on them, but now feature little but one reappearance of an established super-villain after another. This is also true of some long-running DC titles like FLASH--and it seems to be taking hold, paradoxically, in books like SUPERMAN and BATMAN at the very time organised fandom is beginning to get excited over them again. And with good reason, in many cases--Steve Englehart's Batman and Marty Pasko's Superman are much better plotted than the Denny O'Neil and Cary Bates stories that preceded them. And yet -- at least O'Neil and Bates <u>tried</u> to create original villains, and although they came up with all too many punk crooks and energy-beings for most readers, they occasionally came up with winners like Ras al Ghul and Terra-Man. Since taking over Batman's DETECTIVE stories, Englehart has come up with only one villain of his own: the forgettable Dr Phosphorus. His best work has been with Dr Hugo Strange, The Penguin, The Joker and other classic villains from the Kane/Finger/Robinson era. Englehart is one of the <u>best</u> writers in the business, and <u>does</u> come up with original characters (such as Silver St. Cloud) of his own -- but not without reason does he work the names of his innumerable predecessors on this strip into his stories.

This is even more evident in his plots for the JLA book, which many fans, myself included, considered the best comic book on the stands during his tenure. he began by reviving a very minor creation of (who else?) Jack Kirby, dragging John Broome's Guardians into the story very quickly. He

followed it up by developing the Privateer into a very unique character, but the fact remained that he was originally drawn from another source, as, of course, was Willow. People can read his stories and quickly forget such original Englehart creations as the Construct and Count Crystal, but remember his use of O'Neil's Ben Blanx, Fox's Snapper Carr and Key, and of course the Injustice Society, which even as a group was originated by Len Wein. No doubt about it, Steve was capable of great work --but why with other people's characters?

And, again, there's Marty Pasko's work on SUPERMAN--full of villains created by everyone <u>but</u> Marty (except Peg-Leg Portia, who wasn't really a villain) -- Metallo, created by Otto Binder, came back not once but twice, along with Solomon Grundy (who was created by Alfred Bester for, of all people, the original Green Lantern) and Jim Shooter's Amalak and Parasite. Indeed, Shooter was uncommonly creative for a second-generation writer, coming up with a good many memorable characters in his comparatively few Superman stories. Significantly, he was a rare modern example of an imaginative teenager who submitted a story "cold"; he knew nothing of organised fandom until he was already writing professionally. It is unfortunate that even <u>he</u> doesn't seem to match his old level of creativity in his current work for Marvel.

And how many new <u>heroes</u> who last very long are created today? It seems sometimes as if DC and Marvel can do nothing but give supporting characters their own books or cancelled titles another try--at least in the 1960's most of the characters were new, even if their names (Flash, Human Torch...) were not, but now almost all the old favourites are being brought back --and, almost as often, failing.

Perhaps more <u>can</u> be done with the old villains than new ones--we must remember that the classic villains are actually the pick of many years' worth of original characters. Superman's fought a lot of adversaries during his 40 years of adventures; for every Lex Luthor who survives the decades there are several Pranksters who only occasionally get dragged out of mothballs only to demonstrate once again that that's where they belong, and many hundreds of Righab-Beys that nobody even remembers. Why <u>should</u> Marty Pasko wade through Moe Malloys and Sunbursts to find one Terra-Man, when he can utilise such proven adversaries as the Parasite and Metallo <u>all</u> the time? And perhaps, come to think of it, all the really good ideas <u>have</u> been used, and there's not much need to create a new character when an old one will do...

Perhaps so. And yet -- there <u>are</u> some creative books still being published now; titles like SHADE THE CHANGING MAN (the product of an older-generation writer and artist), or -- much as some of my friends would hate to admit it--HOWARD THE DUCK. Creativity is <u>still</u> possible -- and what the industry really needs is more of it, for there won't be anything left to <u>do</u> with the old characters one day if new ones aren't created. And, I hope, the creativity <u>will</u> be found somewhere -- but it's a humbling thought that perhaps neither I nor most of the other people in present-day comic fandom are among those best equipped to provide it. -RHM

KATHOLICITY

Welcome, Phil Emery, to the H.T.D.H.L. (Howard The Duck Haters League)!

Steven Green's mention of Tarzan & Jane having been accused of living in sin by (probably) outraged American matrons struck me as yet another slur on poor old Tarzan, who is far and away Burrough's most moral character. He controls himself when he and Jane are alone together in the jungle and does not try to do what he must have seen all those apes doing (Burroughs puts this down to heredity, proving how little <u>he</u> knew about the English aristocracy, most of whom are descended from royal mistresses). They get married by a Minister of a Protestant persuasion, even if this does mean suddenly disclosing that Jane's father, hitherto featured as an absent-minded professor, was ordained in his youth. (They could, of course, have

been married by the chaplain of the naval vessel present. But, it being the French navy, he would have been R.C., and the outraged matrons of the day would regard being wed by a priest as <u>worse</u> than living in sin.) He is a completely faithful husband to her afterwards. When you consider the other three major series, John Carter and Dejah Thoris certainly get married, but without the blessing of the local church, which J.C. has just destroyed. Not that it seems to bother them. But Carson Napier and Duare don't get married <u>at all</u>, and neither do David Innes and Dian the Beautiful. Venus and Pellucidar don't have marriage as an institution. It seems a bit hard that Tarzan, with the morals of a Boy Scout, is the one who gets a name for improper behaviour.

For some time now, Robin A! Webster and I have been wallowing in epistolary nostalgia (Please don't let us have any false allegations about our relationship, we were chaperoned by Chris, who was looking over Robin's shoulder correcting his grammar) over the Inferior Five. Is there anyone else out there who thought the I5 beat Not Brand Echh hands down? Who can forget them -- Merryman, White Feather, Awkwardman, the Blimp and Dumb Bunny? Merryman was small, skinny, wore glasses, and was of average intelligence. He was the best of the bunch. White Feather, who

would have been a master archer had his hand ever stopped shaking with terror, was the offspring of an archer named King. Awkwardman had an odder yet parentage -- he was the son of an alien being who masqueraded as a man named Brent, and a lady who I say was Aquaman with a sex change --Robin says she was a bifurcated Lori the Mermaid. Awkwardman was incredibly strong, incredibly clumsy, and also in need of frequent total immersion. Blimp's father had been the fastest man alive -- he was the slowest. Dumb Bunny, Athena Tremor (Steve must have done it at last) was strong and beautiful. <u>And</u> stupid. These reluctant heroes--one of their most endearing traits was their willingness to cheerfully admit their shortcomings, hence the group name they picked -- were forced by family pressure into professional superheroics. Fortunately, although weak, cowardly, uncoordinated, slow, and dim respectively, they were all blessed with good luck. E. Nelson Bridwell guided this motley crew through an all-too-brief career while he cheerfully mocked not only the conventions of comics writing -- a left-over Nazi villain is rebuked for speaking perfect English, and apologetically explains he forgot Nazi villains "haff to speak like der Katzenjammer Kids" --and the competition -- as when he asked a question that had bothered me too, about how a certain winged mutant got his shirt on, and provided the reply "You hadda <u>ask</u>! It never bothered me before, but <u>now</u>--!!" -- but he also had a go at the classics. (My God, I thought I wasn't going to be able to extricate myself from that last sentence.) In the epic 'Valhallabaloo' he managed to introduce more authentic Norse myth, even if treated satirically, than Marvel have produced in the whole run of Thor. He carried his group back to the French Revolution (<u>you</u> thought the Bastille was stormed? Wrong! Awkwardman had one of his little accidents!) where they found one Sidney Cartoon gleefully contemplating martyrdom and polishing up his final words, until he was rescued, much against his will, by the Crimson Crysanthemum. The I5 also went to Africa and encountered Darwin of the Apes--but we've had enough about <u>him</u> for one column. Do you think, with all the DC revivals, there would be a chance that E.N.B. would take up his pen again if we all wrote and asked him? You do <u>want</u> to write, don't you? You <u>don't</u> want a visit from Captain Scotnet and his caber, do you?

For this issue's competition (see what you've done, Bassett): it seems that in the new season of Wonder Woman on television the scene is moved to the present, and WW is now nursemaiding Steve Trevor, <u>Junior</u>. So, who has the most plausible suggestion about who Steve Trevor <u>Senior</u> married? Bear in mind that she must have been out of her wits. -KATHLEEN GLANCY

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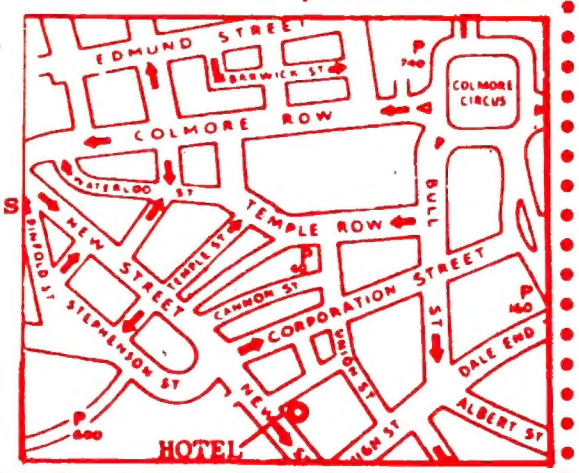

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reaction

Thanks for Bem-16. Firstly, I would like to assure all your readers that I don't have your erstwhile assistant editor -- I have not Nigenapped him. /(How much would we have to pay you to do so?)/

Now on to the Bem contents. I especially enjoyed Katholicity (we ladies have to stick together). Actually, though, Kathy certainly finds plenty to say, I hope I do as well in Magus (available from Phil Greenaway, see ad last time)(Aha, a free plug if ever I saw one!). It's a good thing that Kath doesn't dress as the Black Widow, that would be very strange. Myself, I only dress as Red Sonja or maybe Vampirella, that's because I'm really quite sane and sensible. /(And very cold.)/

K. Williams' column hits the nail on the head again; of course the majority rule, the only way the minority could would be by buying about 100 or so of the title in question each, and even that wouldn't make a lot of difference, for various reasons.

By the sound of it "Steel, the Indestructible Man" is a cross between The Human Fly and the Bionic Man! Let's hope he destructs as soon as possible, and takes The Human Fly with him--books like those we can do without. A thought here -- how many other people have noticed that quite a lot of heroes in comics now have some part or other missing, or are a sort of 'bionic man'? I'm not talking about their emotional hang-ups, they all have those. Any ideas about it, anyone? /(From the lack of a certain "bulge", it's pretty obvious what most of them have missing. But, to be serious, I'd put the trend down to a frantic search for something at all original, or, rather, un-stale.)/

Nice idea having things like Panny and Hot Stuf' mixed in with comic reviews, who typed it? Because whoever typed the Panny review à la G. Barnett deserves a medal. One fine day, when I'm feeling energetic, I might send along some reviews myself; better not send an article, or Ms K.G. might send a tall, handsome Scotsman tossing his caber about to sort me out... I think I will send one in after all.

Trivia note: why aren't there any fanzines written and run entirely by girls?

Since this is my first letter to Bem, I won't go on for too much longer. Just long enough to add my comment to the "would you read comics in public" debate. I do. At my previous job I always took along some comics to read during the lunch hour, and I've just started doing so at my new job. Sure, you get a few funny looks at first, but soon everyone accepts it as being a part of you. Perhaps younger fans feel a bit embarrassed, but when they reach my age (if they're still fans by then), they will find they'll discover it's fascinating when they let people know they read comics. The reactions are incredible!

And on that note I'll sign off.

-Maureen James.

I--I hope it had nothing to do with what I said in my last letter -- the death of poor old Stangroom? He needn't have taken such drastic measures to escape paying his rent. I'm really upset about it. Oh well, I've always wanted to try roasted woodpecker.

I could see it coming, FT either ending or incorporating with some superior zine. Although, once or twice, I thought it was one of the superior brand. I hope this incorporation proves successful, as Bem was starting to fall into a boring routine with the last few issues. /(Doesn't care who he insults, does he?)/

Concerning this year's Marvel annuals, I'm disgusted. Each year they get thinner as well as dearer. I'm sticking to Beano.

-Roger McBroom.

So, Captain Frog now profanes the immortal pencils of Uderzo! But it is great fun, and I look forward to meeting Dreadlocks the Demolisher. Is nothing sacred?

I appreciate the information about U.S. fandom, and the prediction as to the ways in which it will move. I think that fans are going to get more and more interested in Golden Age comics and the emphasis will swing towards small collections of top-class comics instead of the present-day "completism" that prevails. /(The prices of Golden-Age comics will have to come tumbling down before that happens.)/

Small point of order to Ruan Lanihorne --Fat Freddy and his Cat are American. I find "Made in Britain" the most interesting column in the zine, probably because of my strongly nationalist views!

I shall now react to Reaction. I feel that everyone is making rather a mountain out of the molehill of public reaction to comics, and reading comics in public or private does little to alter the image of comics -- it simply changes the image one presents of oneself! /(To a certain extent that's true; to read anything on a bus or tube is presenting an image, that of a bleedin' intellectual type. But, reading a novel on a train is quite acceptable; it's a "normal" type of behaviour. When I read some comics on a train journey, I noticed I was receiving a few good-natured smiles, classifying me as...what? Counter-culturist? Freak? Retarded? There again, perhaps my fly was undone.)/

Hurrah! Interesting reviews at last! Please don't even whisper the suggestion that St*n L**'s evil fingers should ever close on the rights to the Charlton strips --like the man says, they were great and Marvel could not possibly do them justice.

May this small piece of paper record for posterity the sacred memory of Stangroom the Woodpecker. Those of us who came to know and love him will never forget his morose little figure. R.I.P.

-Theo Clarke.

It seems a shame that this is the last time I'll be able to send you a letter of comment on FT, Mike -- and I'll have to publish it myself! Fantasy Trader was, I think, sadly undervalued by many fans during its lifetime--maybe now that it's no longer available as such, people will start to look back on it more kindly. Of course, he added hastily, all FT regulars are very welcome in Bem, and, going out with every mail copy of Bem, the adzine side has as high a circulation as ever!

Anyway, Fantasy Trader #27 was a good, solid issue to end on--the high spot, as ever, was the lettercol. Does Pete Scott really dislike Steve Gerber's work because Steve admits to enjoying the odd hamburger? Can Simon Booth dismiss Seaboard/Atlas as "just crap" on the basis of seeing "three or four of their titles"? If his survey had included Howie Chaykin's issues of SCORPION, DEMON HUNTER (since reincarnated as Devil Slayer at Marvel) by Rich Buckler, DESTRUCTOR by Goodwin, Ditko & Wood, or WULF, which actually managed to be good consistently for all four numbers, then maybe he'd be less sweeping. Out of the 59 Atlas colour comics I've read, around 20% are pretty good, which isn't a bad average. Granted, the rest of the output does include some awful rip-offs, not to mention downright turkeys.../(I think it was the "make-a-fast-buck" ethos of the company that was so off-putting. I thought Destructor was the biggest waste of time I've seen for three talented people.)/

Chris Melchert writes an interesting letter; I hope he can be persuaded to continue the habit. Mike Grace's True Confessions on how he became a Spider-Man and FF fan read well, too, but the next "comment hook" comes with Dave Harwood's deliberations on the sort of fanzine that fans want. Dave likes long, in-depth discussion on various aspects of comics or fandom, but suspects most fans are "simply hooked on the entertainment aspect of the genre". I'd have said that all 5 current major fanzines did cater for a wide variety of tastes; in Bem for example you have the actual comics news, and cover repros, as the "icing on the cake", plus information, and discussion columns which can go into subjects in depth. But there are degrees of depth, I suppose; any one aspect of Bem blown up to fill a whole issue would, to me at least, get a bit boring, except for the strips or Reaction, which would as usual be full of diverse subjects and views...the trouble is, I doubt if there are enough LoC-writers in British comics fandom to do the job.

Oh well, I've enjoyed FT over the years, and it has certainly earned a place for itself in the history of UK fandom -- but I rely on you to make sure that it lives on in Bem. /(Yas, boz!)/

-Martin Lock.

Nice to hear from you and receive Bem-16. Things are definitely on the up and up when FT is amalgamating. Both Bem and FT have been strong, regular personality zines, and uniting should do neither very much harm. In fact, it augurs for a very strong package!

I may not be able to join in with this apa business, as I can hardly find enough time for my own little art projects as it is these days, without adding a further burden. I like the idea, but I doubt if I could produce anything other than drawings on a regular basis, and the odd letter of comment. /(I must admit that I can't see the point of apas. Why bother writing and producing a zine for only 20 people when, if the writing is interesting enough, most of the regular zines would be only too pleased to get their hands on it. If it's not interesting, then it shouldn't get to see print anywhere.)/

Nice to hear that Al Matheson's landed a job at D.C. Thomson. What's he doing there? Maybe a revolution in the kiddie komix field is at hand! I'd like you to mention in Bem that I'm on the lookout for good stories, ideas, plots etc of any nature (humour, SF, horror...) to illustrate in an attempt to break into the comix field, or even the heavy fanzine field! I'll attempt almost anything, okay? /(What's a heavy fanzine? The heaviest I have seen were the early A4 duplicated Fantasy Advertisers produced by Dee G-Skinn. Man, were those heavy.)/

Now Bem-16. Some nice illoes, notably the Moore piece and the "Sudden Comics" thing. The colour pages were an added attraction, and I think the layouts are beginning to look less crushed up these days. I'd like to see more reviews of the imported fanzines, folios etc in pretty much the way "George" used to handle the reviews in Inside Comix. There's so much expensive material being advertised by various dealers that the postal buyer just has to take pot luck. I rely a lot on the reviews when buying these -- nowadays the comic fan has to be very selective. /(I have often wondered how well supported those folios are. Where's the rationale behind paying £5 or so for Adams or Nino prints, when for a fraction of that cost you can see their best comics work, which is what it's all supposed to be about, and you get a story thrown in to boot. Buying the folios denies their credibility as comic artists, as opposed to "mere" illustrators, with all the special skills that involves. Or is the new breed of comic book artist simply an illustrator specializing in miniatures?)/
-Harry McAvinchey.

So, Bem has been going for four years; 16 issues in 4 years is very good, I hope you can keep Bem as regular as possible.

In issue 15, I was asking for another page of Fan-Things, and now Martin Noone asks for one, too. If Ed can't manage an extra page, why not ask someone else to do it--why not Laurence Bowkett, or Ruan Lanihorne, or yourself, or even me!

The best thing in this issue was "Made in America" by Howard P. Siegel, I thought it was really good. You don't get many good articles nowadays, I used to enjoy the old article zines like FU more than I enjoy some of the colour 48-page litho super slik fanzines you find nowadays. Is there no room left for the stencil zines in this day and age? /(One reason for the proliferation of offset "slick" (that is, professional-looking) fanzines is that most editors hope to sell their wares in shops, and there's nothing more likely to turn a potential buyer off than a grubby, badly produced, semi-readable mess. This is also where the (often neglected) art of layout comes into its own; which zines look the most appealing? Yes, I know looks aren't everything, quite.)/

I think Bem is slipping artwise. I've seen Phil Elliott draw better Things, and the Batman on page 8 was as bad as...as the drawings my younger brother, who can't draw very well, does. The rest of the art was okay; Bob Watkins, Terry Moore (page 13), Chris Ash, Martin Dutton, and Superswipe all keep the side up.
-Joe Matthews.

Even considering that Bem is a newszine I found Bem-16 a bit podgy, and I think it could "bemefit" enormously from a few well considered critiques, Highgate Sixish humour, or anything different to give it more surprise-value and make it something to look for -- to give Bem more meat. I found your lead article this time both condescending and basically uninformative --if those fanzines are "Just names to us" then make them more than names, or don't mention them at all.

Made in Britain grows progressively more farcial month by month. Any column which even considers Jinty etc should be editorially castrated.

It was a nice idea originally to have reviews done by a multitude of hosts, but personal opinions vary wildly; the result has been a loss of objectivity. /(Diversity of opinion is usually a good thing, but it would be helpful to know the reviewer's standpoint. Kirby-lover/hater? DC-ite, Marvelite, black leather fetishist? Someone suggested a reviewer should decide (a) what the creator is trying to do, (b) how well did he do it, and (c) was it worth doing, but that sounds rather soulless to me. The problem is that highly opinionated reviews, which is what most comic fans indulge in, are only effective and useful when the readers come to know the reviewer's tastes. On the other hand, Bem's review column is really designed as much as an opinion/discussion piece as an information thing, non?)/

Finally, thank Crom for Katholicity! The Black Woman-with-a-deceased-spouse can always be relied on to put some guts into her column.

Here's hoping that Mike can give Bem some fresh impetus.
-Colin French.

I see that Len Wein has left Marvel. Hooray! Now that he's joined DC, maybe we'll see some good scripts from him! At Marvel, he had a very annoying habit of bringing back old villains, and having them fight the heroes--that was all. What is the point in reviving old characters, if you don't add some new element to the story, to keep the book interesting? In fact what he does is re-write old stories --and he doesn't do it at all well!

Of course, he's not the only Marvel writer who does this; and Marvel's better writers are often stuck on their worst books! Doug Moench on GODZILLA, and Chris Claremont on MS MARVEL, for example.

Jim Starlin deserves a share of the brickbats, too. His work for Marvel since his return has just not been up to scratch (with the exception of AVENGERS ANNUAL). He doesn't seem to want to pencil books any more, he only seems to do layouts. I must admit I loved AVENGERS ANNUAL -- he obviously put some effort into that. Not so with TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL; apart from only a few places, the art was rather ordinary, something I thought would never be said of Starlin art. This amazed me--after all, it was the conclusion of the Warlock/Thanos subplot which Jim took over a year to build up, so I thought he'd make a good job of it.

A bit of praise is in order for Marvel, too, for assigning Pat Broderick (what an artist!) and Mike Zeck regular books, not to mention the netting of a big fish like Carmine Infantino. /(Yeah, Info back at the drawing board really does look great, though his inkers do help a lot. Nowhere was it more apparent than on his pencils at Warren what a difference the inker makes -- under Milgrom, Infantino looked terrible; under Nino, terrific.)/

Conway's new books seem...different.

I notice a lot of really great artists like Kaluta and Wrightson only do covers, some not even that now (Mike Ploog, for example). I wish some regular artists, like Dillin and Heck, would take a leaf from their books. I miss Ploog, Wrightson and Kaluta, and really wish they would draw more interiors. /(As such artists become more popular, they can afford to concentrate on covers, which are much more lucrative than the inside pages. What is more annoying is when artists do so many years in comics, then move on to pure illustration or advertising, after using comics as an apprenticeship period.)/

Another fine artist who more recently (very recently) entered the comics field is Mike Golden. I've only seen a few pages of his work, but they are good. He has a style which has obvious Byrne, Infantino and Newton influences, which help to make his work most enjoyable.
-Ken Moore.

I must agree, Bem-16 is a trifle cramped. It only really matters, however, in the cover repros where you can't read the blurbs and balloons. The X-Men one was worst, in that all you could see was that someone is finally beating up Wolverine. Good. I might like Nightcrawler, but I can't stand Wolverine. /(He seems to be fulfilling the same rôle Hawkeye did in the early AVENGERS: the love-to-hater. You'll pay for an issue just to see him get his proper deserts. There again, he is small, so his personality does fit. You know what Shakespeare's Caesar said about small men, of course.)/

Then the Green Lantern cover--my guess for GA's speech balloon is "Holy Hannah! How do I help Green Lantern, whose ring is strangling him? Perhaps I should just shoot him in the back and put him out of his misery." Anyway, his pose suggests that that is what he is going to do.

Never mind, the rest of it is at least legible, and up to the usual standard. I can't wait to see what Keith Williams has to say about being taken for a lady. I myself was recently accused of not being a real person--I think the reviewer took me for a (probably male) syndicate.
-Kéíí & Kéíín Kathleen Glancy.

Congratulations on Bem 16, which cost 15p, in case you hadn't realised. /(Wha?)/ Katholicity was, as usual, totally irrelevant drivel. How about some more of Mr Ash's excellent art to liven up her page? Made In America was interesting, but I'm not quite sure I understand everything Mr Seigel said. /(Eat a dictionary.)/

Back on this side of the Atlantic, Ruan Lanihorne's column was excellent as usual, but was a costly and lengthy review of annuals really worth it? /(Why costly? Ruan is happy with a few lashes, and the whips hardly ever need replacing. British annuals are a neglected area, so I thought that the space was well used; it gives you more of an idea of what to look out for--or avoid.)/ Ed Sallis also did well, Fan-Things must be among the top few columns in comics fandom.

Roger McBroom's comments concerning the relative merits of Stangroom (the Woodpecker) and Herman (the one-legged disaster area) only go to show that I was right when I recommended that he visit a psychiatrist--if he isn't doing so already. /(Only on rainy Wednesdays in months with an R in them.)/

I'm not afraid of the Black Wid--(sorry, slip of the pen) Kathleen Glancy, so there! Only, don't give him my full address -- can't you see I'm shaking in my boots at the thought of being "sorted out." /(Kéíí and Kéíín say Kathleen says it's dead easy to sort someone out; arms in one box, legs in another, eyeballs in the special tin: no sweat at all.)/

You really shouldn't have stunted the growth of Reaction--it can be the best bit of the whole zine. Isn't it a bit risky replacing ace letter answerer Nige Edwards with Mike Cruden, you could be the cause of World War III½? /(Did I ever mention how much I hate people whose names begin with J?)/

If I understand Sigh properly, what K. (Kate? -- tee hee!) was trying to say is that, in a very primitive way, comic books are a democracy; the ways in which a book will move is dictated not by the editor but by the readership. This might seem to be a bad thing, but I don't think so; it saves us from a deluge of Kirbyism, the Human Louse, Godzilla, etc. On the other hand it means that minority things get killed off, but isn't that what fandom & the underground are for? /(But wouldn't it be delightful to see things like the McGregor titles prosper, i.e. for comics to come of age. Anyway, readers only decide that comics will move, that there will be a change of format; editors decide the direction.)/

Very pleased with the tones sneaking into Bem, keep them going.

-Jonathan Rogers.

I received my membership card for The Society of Comics Enthusiasts just this morning. After all this time, only 21 people have joined! Don't people want to be able to buy imports for only 19p, for example? Help us to wake people up -- if 'fandom' is so apathetic over worthwhile causes, what the bloody hell can it achieve? Nigel Balloch needs support now. Help him to help us all. Please.

-Ken Furbank.

Thanks for Bem-16, another extremely impressive fanzine. British fandom seems to be more well-developed than its U.S. counterpart--I think the fans (including myself) have been spoiled by the slick 'zines: we often forget our roots and our purpose. BEM doesn't make that mistake.

A few comments:

Your TALE-ENDERS included an interesting statement on DC's mystery line. There's a lot of great material published in our various mystery lines--presuming you like mystery stories. Granted, we're taking particular care with DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE to make it (as I stated in my house ad) a new kind of mystery book, but by and large, all of our mystery titles are very individualistic. A story for GHOSTS would not work in UNEXPECTED, a story for HOUSE OF MYSTERY would not work in SECRETS OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE. The titles Murray edits (Ghosts, Unexpected, Witching Hour) are completely different from those Paul edits (H/Mystery, H/Secrets, Secrets of Haunted House, Weird War), and DOORWAY, edited by Joe Orlando and Jack C. Harris, is a third breed. Granted, only lately have we been able to make any sort of distinction between HOUSE OF MYSTERY & HOUSE OF SECRETS.

It might interest you to know that that fabled 4-year backlog of mystery stories barely exists today--the "4-year" figure was accurate only after Carmine cancelled most of the mystery titles; you'll note they have been reinstated. Today we are buying at least one mystery story for each one we print, and these days we're featuring the work of Mike Kaluta on covers, Berni Wrightson on a more occasional basis (H/M covers from time to time), Johnny Craig, Mike Golden, Val Mayerik, Steve Ditko, Alex Nino...

The SUPERMAN/ALI book hasn't really been delayed, as you noted. The book is finished (save for the usual production tricks, like going over 72 pages of proofs...) and the only advertised date we've put in in our comics the last six months was "on sale this winter" or "on sale the first of the year". Granted, last January we did an ad that offered a summer release... In any event, we have not put a release date on the book because of distribution difficulties: in the United States, there are large areas that have a December 31st floor tax: anything on the floor or in the warehouse on that date is taxed. Therefore, everything of value (and the ALI book is a $2.50 item) is returned on December 30th. Instead of having a shortened shelf-life, we're going to release the book on the first tabloid distribution date in January (unlike the regular comics, the tabloids are also sent out to bookstores and toy shops, so the Warner Books people also have to be consulted). It appears this date will be January 12th... if so, that will be the first "official" release date the book has had--we've had deadline dates and the like; perhaps that's where the confusion started. It takes longer to print a tabloid -- more plates to cut, more pages to proof, etc.

The ALI book, by the way, will be printed on heavy, white stock.

One last comment, to my U.S. friend, Howard Siegel (and to your readers): oddly enough, the past two price increases did not effect sales -- to a certain extent, they helped sales. Now I understand this defies logic, so let me explain. Comics are a low profit item for wholesalers and retailers. The profit to be made on a 25 cent magazine isn't worth the effort of shipping, warehousing and floor space. Whenever we raise the price--which we do to meet printing increases, by the way--the wholesalers and retailers make more money for the same amount of effort and floor space. More copies are moved out of the warehouses, and, most importantly, people who do not sell comics start handling them. With the last increase, we've started seeing people taking comics who stopped about eight years ago when the Batman craze was over. Today, the average retailer will make $15 per week in comics profit -- as compared with $6.15 per week with deodorants -- and most retailers are under the impression deodorants are more important than comics!

By the way, I'm one of 2000 A.D.'s biggest fans in the States -- I'm looking forward to seeing your work.

-Mike Gold.

/(The seemingly panic-cancellation of an entire range always puzzles me, as with the Marvel black and white horror line; surely there's a market for at least one. How refreshing to hear something optimistic about comics; this aura of optimism coincided with Jenette Kahn's entry into comics, and the lady seems to be directly or indirectly responsible for maintaining it.)/

With CU no longer doing comic reviews and news, your near total devotion to all aspects of the subject fills a large gap in my reading. I found it interesting to see that people read the ordinary British comics; I still read the ones my younger brother gets, after reading some poor quality Marvel a good giggle at these is a wonderful tonic. So Ruan Lanihorne's section will always be welcome. As for his reviews, I am now tempted to go out and buy a couple of the annuals he covers. Anyone who's read my letters in CU may have guessed that I've bought the Dr Who annual and the Terry Nation Dalek annual -- neither is particularly good, though the old Dalek strip reprints from TV 21 are worth the money.

The three cartoon strips were certainly interesting. Captain Frog appealed to my sense of humour; Thundermole is different, and Stangroom the Woodpecker was downright morbid...a bit ironic, too. Is it the end of this strip? If so, it will be rather a sad loss. Still, popular demand could probably bring him back to life.

-K.F. Stubbs.

I was going to say that you seem to have some mystical knack for printing a thoughtful and interesting article each and every issue, and respectfully ask if it were possible to have <u>two</u> such articles per issue. However, such comments have been made largely redundant by fandom's latest bombshell (!), and I don't know very much (would you believe nothing?) about Bemusing. By the way, will you be retaining the title "Whispers of Insanity" for the letters column? I rather like it --is it derived from somewhere, or did it spring unbidden and whole from someone's university-educated mind? /(As far as I can recall, it isn't a quote, though I was going through a T.S. Eliot period when I titled my letters column. I think it has a certain je ne sais quoi, and Martin has my full permission to use it should he so desire--I know ol' T.S. wouldn't object.)/

Anyway, to return to FT the 27th (and last, sob! blubber...), I would agree with Mr T.O.M. when he describes Stan's vision as being "realistic, courageous and market orientated", but he doesn't seem to agree with himself later on. I don't think I'm being deliberately obtuse when I find another seeming contradiction in the essay. The b&w magazines, which include SSoC, are described as generally having "no consistency of standard" in one paragraph, and in the next as being "so much mediocrity". To me there is a great deal of difference between 'mediocre' and 'inconsistent'. /(TOM?)/

The titles Tom lists as swipes are really that, yet I would argue that there was at least some element of risk in some of them, as it is trite but true to say that pure science-fiction has not sold well in comic form. Also, regarding 'War of the Worlds' and 'Kung Fu', there was a considerable amount of creativity involved. Not that this had anything to do with Lee, but I don't think they should be classed together with, for example, 'Planet of the Apes'. Oddly enough, 'Dracula' too has evolved into a title of some quality and character. Even odder, it appears to be selling quite well. /(There's still the point that new concepts from Marvel are few and far between. From DC you get Stalker, Starfire, Jonah Hex, et al. The Marvel starting point at least is usually a derivation. Regarding Dracula, I smell a hype. If Wein and Andru had gone to Lee and said "Sorry Stan, we can't manage to produce SPIDER-MAN monthly any more, it will have to go bi-monthly", he would have replied "Certainly. Forget about the lost income, it's integrity that counts." Like hell he would.)/

I feel that SILVER SURFER was a deliberate quality product, in that Lee knew there was a great interest in the character on the part of his 'new' audience. It was published for prestige, possibly, and it failed quite probably because Lee overestimated the depth of support for what was always a rather boring character. By the way, whose credit is Lee robbing? This isn't a criticism, I'd like to just know. /(I assume Tom was referring to the Marvel

artists, who used to practically write their own stories, though not necessarily dialogue them, despite Lee being credited as the scripter.)/

Whatever you think of Gerber's work generally, now or in the past, I think you have got to respect what he is trying to do, to explore new worlds and horizons that have not yet been explored in overground comix. He is not writing for the 11-year old reader specifically, but just who he thinks he is writing for has so far eluded me. Give me time, though. /(The sophisticated comics fan, well-versed in comics lore, and as sick of comics cliché as is Gerber himself.)/

Very surprised to discover that the Code allowed such goings-on in the TARZAN ANNUAL. Under the Marriage and Sex Section of the Code, point 2 states "...sexual abnormalities are unacceptable", and point 7 adds "Sex perversion or any inference to same is strictly forbidden." I would have thought that bestiality came under one of those categories. /(Well, the comic doesn't actually show Tarzan...er...doing anything ...er... specific, just with a lustful twinkle in his icy-blues.)/

Actually, I'd like to see the Code spend less time worrying about sex and more time hammering violence. I mean, both sex and violence are natural and important, but not in the proportions allotted to them in most comic-books. /(That's because sex is the great hang-up of the western Christian civilization, and that in turn is the basis for most of the social/moral problems of today's society. Violence, on the other fist, has the blessing of the bible, and therefore of the society that it still stranglingly influences.)/

-Simon Booth.

Thanks a lot for sending the Bem back issues so quickly; it's certainly improved vastly since the early issues. You have undoubtedly featured some interesting articles and columns--I especially liked the Highgate Six pieces, and hope you'll continue to feature them. I always enjoy reading interviews of any kind in fanzines --probably because they don't contain the forced, thought-out feeling that conventional articles always have--not that I'm against them, it's just that interviews have that natural quality about them, where a speaker says what he wants on the spur of the moment. It's a pity someone doesn't bring out a complete fanzine with just discussion interviews in it; with different people being interviewed, and discussions on different topics, it would surely create a unique and interesting concept. /(I doubt such a zine would sell very well, though interviews and taped discussions would make good material for an APA.)/

A lot of people seem to be saying comics are going through a slump. A slump in what? Quality? Quantity? Original ideas? Or maybe they're just fed up when the titles they prefer are cancelled. People who say comics are (to put it mildly) in a slump have mainly been reading them for a good many years, and know what they're talking about--or at least think they do. But what about the newest lot of readers and collectors? To them, comics are a new, absorbing interest; what do they know about what happened years ago, except by purchasing back issues? /(If comics have any pretentions to being an adult entertainment/communication medium, then all us oldsters are justified in our complaints. There's little point in bringing out new titles if they're going to be handled in the same old way; in effect, there's nothing new. DC, on the other hand, are making the best of what they're got, giving old heroes a new treatment, which does sound more logical.)/

On to something less serious--no sorry, didn't mean to say that -- thirty seconds silence, please, for our lost woodpeck, who must have gone to a better place. Aww --ain't it sad?

I'm becoming increasingly worried with Ms Glancy's column, which just seems to be taking the Mickey and trying to boost her own ego. Lines such as "I complained recently of the lack of super-heroes in this city" don't help. That's just the kind of thing someone against comics is looking for, and it destroys any credibility fandom may seem to have. Humour is one thing, and we all need it, but please, Kathleen, in moderation -- you've written such good letters in the past, don't destroy the respect we have for you--just what was the point of this latest piece, anyway? /(Humour is great, unless it's simply not funny (and that's largely a matter of taste). There's little more preposterous than small-minded people making their essentially trivial hobbies sound as though they're matters of life and death. No, I'm not saying comics are not serious stuff, sometimes, but humour is useful for perspective.)/

-Gerard Kelly.

It occurs to me that Bem is no longer just a newszine with the occasional short article thrown in--was it ever? What you have got here is a very nicely laid-out zine with regular articles, and unlike other fanzines in the past with this format, Bem's managed to keep fresh and interesting.

Congratulations, I just bought the 2000 A.D. with your story. I get the feeling that I might have read something like it before (so many of those 50's sf comic tales written, weren't there?) but maybe deja vu's playing me false. /(Having scripted a couple of 2000 AD shorts myself, I can admit it is difficult to come up with a totally fresh idea. My method is to transplant the ideas/themes to a new setting.)/ On the subject of comics writing, how exactly are scripts set out in the way of format? I've often toyed with the idea of submitting a script myself, but never could figure out how to go about it. /(I do a plot synopsis, then break it up into panels (i.e. scenes or sequences), then write a description of the scene and the caption or dialogue for each panel.)/

No comment on the Bem/Fantasy Trader collaboration until I see the results.

-Phil Emery.

It'd be interesting to see a News At Bem in the not too distant future explaining why it was felt necessary to print the cover of Bem-16 in that strange colour. There was something in that perverted hue, that retarded reproduction, the very grotesqueness of grot which pervaded that cover, which somehow conjoured up long-forgotten images... conjurations of an incident, until now hidden by the glutinous mists of time, when my first copy of F/A arrived. Not that Fantasy Advertiser was my first zine, nor the one which induced me to indulge in a maniacal orgy of fanzine buying, but for some reason it has always been the first "first-fanzine" to spring to my mind. For me, the first zines I bought will always be the grottiest, and, from a cretin-bastard-romantic point of view, the best.

No wonder then that I warmed instantly to Bem-16, grotty but great, in cover at least; inside was something else. If any British publisher ever does a BEST OF FANZINES job on the lines of EAGLE, Bem-16 should go straight in. Boredom circuits were shattering from under-use, the whole magazine made an entertaining read...with articles, columns, letters and cartoons, and now with Mike Cruden sticking his oar in, I'm sure Bem is going to be THE family fanzine of the decade. All you need now is a "Win A Night Out With Captain Frog" competition, and I'm sure the local co-op will be stocking Bem alongside Family Circle and Better Homes And Gardens.

As you can see, I've nothing really relevant to say about Bem at the moment; better luck next time.

Isn't it funny how you're turning into a family-type zine, and Panny thinks it's ...maybe I've defeated myself here... I was going to say that if Inside Comics could try to be Time, why doesn't some zine copy Playboy, in standards of production and content rather than subject, but I think Panny is trying to ape Playboy now anyway...

Perhaps your plea for articles needed a little more spice--after all, anybody can dole out a lengthy synopsis of each OMEGA episode, or chart the characters in MASTER OF KUNG FU. Why don't you set a challenge for...a full-page article on the character of Godzilla, or Ted Sallis, or Uncle Fudge? Or how about some articles on weird themes, not in the HTD interview vein... I mean, "Theories on the Savage Land", or "How Can SHIELD Stand Up Against The Anti-Security Trendiness Pervading America?" "Does Marv Wolfman's London Exist Anywhere?" How about an editors' round table, or something about the things which go on in the stories. How about..."Approaching Panther's Rage as a Rock Opera"?

-Grayum Baset.

Muchos gracias for Bem-16; the author's first view of this magazine. Was completely baffled by Katholicity, so missed it out to proceed to things I'd seen before in fanzines. With the inclusion of news, varied I notice with some interest taken in British products, reviews (to which the same comment applies), together with articles, letters and thingies, I gather Bem desires to be all things to all fans. Quite laudable too, and, when littered with a lot of generally pleasing artwork, very enjoyable.

Although I think some attention should be paid to British comix generally, I can't say I'm particularly enamoured of any of them. Perhaps I don't see enough of the right ones; I still associate British stuff with infant humour strips or "rip-out-his-guts" war (or football!) stories. I did see a couple of issues of Brainstorm though, which were pretty good.

I've never seen a Review Section (how did you think up that name?!) like Bem's, but I think I like it. I assume readers send in unsolicited reviews rather like letters? /(They do indeed -ML)/ Anyway, it gave the section more balance, more of a consensus of opinion, and so was not restricted to the personal preferences of a lone reviewer. It was particularly interesting in the cases where there were two reviews of the same title.

Before I forget, I'll just mention Howard Siegel's column; it was very good, illuminating and contrasting British and U.S. fandom.

-Simon Booth.

ANOTHER LOAD OF OLD bOLLOGks from ~~THE SEX PISTOLS~~ ALAN MATHESON ~~THE SEX PISTOLS~~

The British u/g scene resembles the punk rock front. Both began with great promise about 18 months ago, and now both have fallen into a state of great decline. The punk/new wave side has a few exceptions, a few GREAT bands (the Buzzcocks, for instance)--but where are the GREAT (even great) u/g mags?

The only newish books I have are all 2nd division u/gs. Take Borin Van Loon's new book. It seems the Wandsworth's People magazine used to publish his strips regularly, but with the demise of said mag, Mr Loon decided to put them all under one cover. Called URBAN PARANOIA, it's just that, all the everyday working incidents with the sometimes horrific consequences taken to their full extent. I found the art inventive, but his lines and use of were rather tired in places. His stories however are more like observations, and as such they work well. A small booklet, but worth 20p I'd say. Get it at Suburban Books, 204 Peckham Rye, London SE22. And remember to add postage to all orders.

Marc Baines' GRAPH ART FREEK MAG came out recently. Marc has been trying hard to find his exact plane, but I don't think he's quite reached it yet. Too much space was taken up with full-page artwork, and most of the articles were a bit away from what I've taken to be the concept. Still, half of it is excellent/first class--but too many passengers are present. The lad's nearly there, and it's well worth 35p.

A new name and comik to me was POSITIVE FEEDBACK, from Julian Braybroke. I don't like the art, finding it very derivative and cartoony/loose. His stories are his saving grace, however; as in Urban Paranoia they use the clever/witty approach. It's 20p and worth it if you've a bob to spare.

There are others of course, Street Comix etc, but I haven't seen anything from those stables lately. Anyway, everybody reviews them. And with Brainstorm ceasing operations it looks bleak, bleak, bleak!

Heavy Metal? Star*Reach? Well, of the latest ones I've seen, the only high points are Moebius and Ken Steacy respectively. HM is perhaps over-praised a lot and I'm as guilty as anyone for sure. I find S*R a BORE, it's all titties and bums, see!

People aren't doing things as well as they should at the moment. What is needed is a well-illustrated, exciting, relevant comik. And on that line, COMIX PLUS #5 should be out sometime around March/April. With such as Talbot, Schofield, Edgell, Bonk, A.J., Noon, Hendry, Scott etc, it should be worth it, oh, such hype, hype.

And if you want a real u/g comik strip, try Lord Snooty in 'The Beano'! -AM

Send comix for review here to Al Matheson, 8 Nicoll St (Bottom Right), Dundee. The heading was donated by Malcolm McLaren.

MADE IN AMERICA

HOWARD P. SIEGEL

THE AMERICAN COMIC ART CONVENTION: AN IDEA THAT FAILED

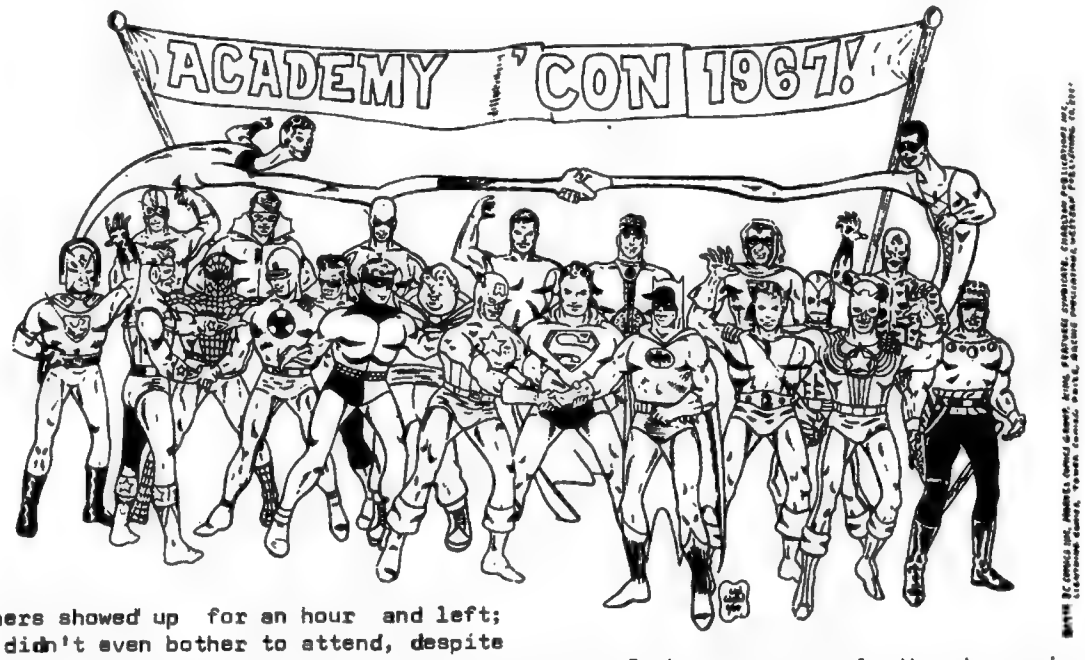
In Bem-16 I attributed the comic art convention to the growing needs of a formalized fandom. For the first several years, they were managed by, planned for, and dedicated to the fan/collector. The professional editors, artists and writers attended without hesitation, and they did so as a token of appreciation for the adoration and recognition given to them by fans. Until then, they had never expected, and never received, acknowledgement that their talents were praiseworthy, except for a random letter now and then.

The first convention as we recognise it, based upon common agreement, was held in New York City in 1964. It established the basic format for the future. It was held during the Summer, giving out-of-towners the opportunity to travel when school was out. The formal luncheon honouring several luminaries in the professional ranks, the pro and fan panel discussions, the costume parade. They were all part of that 2-day inaugural con. A few bridge tables made up the "dealers room"; there was no lavish program book, big auction, or media coverage. In essence the affair was a quiet one. The pace was slow, and nobody found himself with unused time on his hands.

By 1967, fandom had grown considerably. The Alley Awards, begun in 1961 by a group calling themselves the Academy of Comic Book Arts & Sciences, gave "best" recognition in ten categories on the basis of under 200 cast ballots. Results appeared in THE COMIC READER and ON THE DRAWING BOARD for the first eight years. In 1969 the ballot number doubled, and for the first time the awards were meted out at the New York Comicon. The main winners were the Fantastic Four as best adventure title, Dick Giordano as best editor, Roy Thomas as best writer, Neal Adams as best penciller, and Tom Palmer as best inker. Spider-Man was deemed the best adventure hero, while the Hall of Fame Award went to Burne Hogarth's Tarzan, and the 1969 New York Comicon was named the best fan project. No doubt the latter was compensation for housing the ceremony. The Alley Awards, incidentally, were named after V. T. Hamlin's famous newspaper strip about a caveman, Alley Oop; and a statue in his likeness was doled out to each recipient. These awards and others like them to date have always been a virtual sham in that nominees were listed although ineligible or miscast, and the committees doing the tallying were grossly inefficient. Nevertheless, the intention was there, even though the Alleys, and most of their like, were popularity contests rather than honours based on achievement.

Attendance at the conventions increased, larger hotels were needed, and newspapers and television stations found the affairs to be a good source of light humour. Inevitably, these media focused on grown men and women reading comic books; how the price of a 10c comic increased to $3000, or some such unfair attitude. By 1969 the tone of the comic art convention had changed...and changed considerably. Cons in the large cities were annual affairs. Detroit, Chicago, Miami, Dallas, Houston, and San Diego. Some were held only days apart; one of my readers once advised me that he saved all year to "follow the route" during the summer, attending seven conventions with only nine days between them left for travelling. In many cases he met the same dealers three or four times. They too worked as many commercial opportunities as possible into a short time.

By 1970, hotel charges and airfares had increased considerably, preventing many from attending far-away conventions. The veteran con-goers saw the changes -- much to their disgust. Pro artists demanded fees for attending, or displaying their works; some even huckstered their work in aisles and corners, like common peddlers.



Others showed up for an hour and left; Or didn't even bother to attend, despite promising to do so. Dealers asked outrageous prices for their wares. Star Trek inundated the large rooms, causing many to wonder if they were at an SF con or a comic art one. Whole sections displayed and sold toys, novelties, hardbacks, buttons, movie lobby cards & photographs, pulps, costume pieces, etc. The connection? They bore a likeness of a comic character. Value was determined by cult worship, and some great artists and writers were short shrifted in favour of Kirby, Adams, Frazetta, etc.

Today four or five day conventions are common, running around the clock. The late movie sessions, with chapter plays of the thirties and forties sandwiched between Mickey Mouse and Tom & Jerry cartoons running into the wee hours of the morning. TV Batman episodes, the Star Trek "blooper" reel, 2001, and the old Superman films are staple fare. High admission fees are justified by plastic bags full of "goodies"-- the con program booklet, assorted flyleaf ads, free comic books courtesy of the major publishers, and perhaps a dozen clear polyethylene comic book storage bags and similar items, all of which are given to the attender at the door. The pros or fan notables are recognised by badges of a different colour from the rest, so that neophyte fans will know who to stare at, or ask for an autograph. By now, even innovations have ceased to add variety. The bare cupboard is noticeable when lecturers speak to ever-dwindling audiences about the Dead End Kids movies, and 8mm amateur movies by teenagers are shown for evaluation. Several conventions have been closed by local authorities, and the managers arrested for allowing obscene or outright pornographic publications to be displayed and sold by dealers; there is a limit to how far one can go under the guise of Sword & Sorcery. Undergrounds, once the "hot item", have lost their uniqueness, replaced on tabletops by remainders from Charlton or the ill-fated Harvey Thriller series. This same space was once occupied by 1940s MLJ or Nedor titles, resplendent with covers starring the black and gold-garbed Black Terror complete with white skull-and-crossbones emblem on his chest, or the red, white and blue costume of the Shield, G-Man Extraordinary. Copies of old National Geographics or Marvel Super Hero bubble-gum cards replace Alter Ego, Gosh Wow! and other great fanzines of yesteryear. Such scenes reveal the change in convention attitudes. At one time the big news breaks happened at conventions. I remember several, such as DC announcing that it was reviving Fawcett's Captain Marvel, the "Big Red Cheese" that once outsold Superman. Jack Kirby's defection from Marvel to DC, and the revelation that his first projects for the latter would include his now-famous trilogy of Forever People, New Gods and Mr Miracle. Today, thanks to publisher newsletters and fanzines specializing in publication news, all that is gone, and with it the thrill of discovering something important in such appropriate surroundings. Fans complain about the sameness of new characters and titles, rising costs and the like. They have been complaining about the very same things for half a decade.

The future of the comic art convention? If the trend continues, I believe that many will perish. Others will be held less frequently, and vest-pocket meetings and small weekend two-room minicons will be back in vogue. Retrogression? Yes. But logical, and inevitable. Where did things go wrong? The comic art convention, as originally intended, lost its meaning and purpose when other forms of pop culture and nostalgia were allowed to invade its sanctified halls. These alien entities swallowed up true panelology, with the help of over-commercialism, until an implosion is inevitable. I hope that you, my British friends, will take note, and avoid such pitfalls in the years to come

REVIEW SECTION

MARVEL COMICS SUPER SPECIAL #2 (1977)
The Savage Sword of Conan: "Revenge of the Barbarian" by Roy Thomas, John Buscema, Alfredo Alcala & Marie Severin

"Oh Crom, not another Conan story! With the uninspired colour comic and the spasmodically dull black & white mag, we need another episode? Well, let's try it, at any rate. Hm. J.B. is on form, I suppose. Wait a few pages though, and Alcala will change his pencils beyond recognition... No, quite nice in fact. Yes, and combined with some beautiful pastel-shade Severin colours, it's really not bad at all. The story's not bad either--a bit moralising perhaps, but nice. One of the few times I've not had to struggle to finish a marathon Conan story (50 pages). It just proves that if you take your time over something, it shows. Keep turning out work like this, RT & JB; but I think you will have to ease up on your Conan output, or you (or the readers) will collapse from the strain. Still; nice one."-L. Bowkett

DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE #1 (February)
by David Michelinie & Val Mayerik

Quite nice... if you like that sort of thing.

Now, how can I explain exactly what I mean? Well, it's a very well-executed job. The story itself could in no way be considered original, or even vaguely surprising...the characters are of little or no intrinsic interest...our hostess, Madame Xanadu, is virtually a female Phantom Stranger...

But... for what it is, it's very well presented. I don't think it'll last--and for that matter I don't really think it ought to. But it's quite nice... if you like that sort of thing. -K. Williams

CREEPY #94 (January)

Without doubt the best of the current Warrens, this 'Weird Children's Issue" has the least eye-catching and best cover by Don Maitz. Six stories with the theme of weird children are featured, all good and all vaguely reminiscent of Ray Bradbury. There's the yarn about a child born like an old crone who proceeds to grow younger as she ages, so that she dies with the mind of an 80-year-old and the body of a baby, a couple of SF/horror stories, a straight psycho/drama, and a sword and sorcery based fantasy. But the gem of the month is a straight copy of Bradbury's story of time travellers who hunt game in the prehistoric past, and inadvertantly kill a creature back then--changing time forever. What saves this story is the art, superbly rendered by Alex Nino and worth the cost of the import by itself.

The Warren magazines are expensive, and as such less popular among the younger readers, but for the more mature fan they are worth the extra. -Mike Grace

FIRESTORM #1 (March)
"Make Way For Firestorm" by Conway, Milgrom, Janson & Rubinstein

Upon first reading I was struck by the similarity of the characters & Concepts of Firestorm with Nova and/or Captain Marvel. The main man--Ronnie Raymond--is very Richard Ryder, while the split personality theme is Captain Marvel/Rick Jones with the rôles reversed. The whole thing is treated in such an inoffensive and enjoyable way though, that the similarities don't really matter. Firestorm, who can alter atomic structure at will, is fun to read (in this issue at least); good script; good art (though with a pretty silly costume); good start. -LB

THE SWEENEY ANNUAL (1978)
Brown & Watson, £1.25, 64 pages

Unlike Ruined Lanihorne, I could only afford one annual this year, and the one I chose to snap up was THE SWEENEY. The point that interests me is that, apart from the hard covers, this could be an ordinary magazine in the House of Hammer mould. The articles are interesting, and more, they seem to be written with more care than one would expect. The fiction is the usual stuff constructed around a few photos and providing some nice light reading--but the thing which should interest you, if nothing else does, is the fact that there are strips, three of them, illoed it seems by the Amazing Brian Lewis --these are two procedural thrillers, "Boy Wonder" (6pp, colour) & "Hyena in London" (6pp, b & w), and a whodunnit, "Right Time, Right Place" (4 pages in colour, and half a page b & w). As you can see, only the whodunnit is really given adequate space, and although it pleases me no end to see a British TV show get the sort of treatment usually reserved for vapid foreign imports, I can't help feeling a little disappointed.

It's at this point that my criticisms begin to falter, because it always sounds a little pretentious (and besides that I can't spell right); despite being basically a flashy cop show, "The Sweeney" does come up with the occasional couple of gems per series (such as the recently repeated "Queen's Pawn") which are slightly more offbeat, more cynical than the usual sort of filler, and with the inspiration of the EMI movie if nothing else I'd have liked to have seen a little more of the Sweeney uniqueness in the annual. Okay, so these are basically kiddy items, quick selling trash to satiate 8-year-old snots who've buggered the unbreakable Dalek and bunged themselves full of chocs, but, surely, this is the reason why we should expect to see a little more catering for the minority...if as Frank Pepper claimed in his F/A interview these hardbacks are basically rag-bags for the new untested staff to have a go in, surely we could have a little more experimentation, even more so than in House of Hammer, which has to sell twelve issues a year. I'm not speaking here just as a poncy comic fan with fancy ideals -- I can still remember my disgust when I realised that the only thing IMPOSSIBLE about my MISSION annual was the task of reading it, or when I realised that James Bond didn't actually appear in the JAMES BOND annual, apart from a few stills from the newly-released "Thunderball". All right, so things are better now, and Brian Lewis is certainly more skilled than whoever scribbled the "Mission Impossible" strips, but good art does not a good story make, and it seems almost ludicrous that, while U.K. fandom has emerged bottle-fed from U.S. fandom, or however Howard Siegel put it, British comics still have to scramble up from the depths. My criticisms of "Hyena in London" and "Boy Wonder" are that Regan came off just a little too much like Starsky and Batman, dashing in with his gun ready at the slightest provocation, punching and telling guys with one blow, and coming out with some really obscure cockney slang. Really, it was dull apart from the art.
-Graeme Bassett

WONDER WOMAN SPECTACULAR (1978)
"The Cosmic Quest for the Disc of Mars" by Harris, Delbo, Ditko, Heath, Ayers, & Colletta; DC Special Series No. 9

Really much better than I expected. I was dubious whether 64 pages of WW could hold my attention (!), but was pleasantly surprised. The plot is too involved to go into here, but with three story-lines--Wonder Woman in Europe, Amazons vs Harpies (which allows Russ Heath to present nubile female warriors clothed in provocative if practically useless bits of armour), and Aphrodite vs Mars -- it needs every page. The latter encounter has some excellent art (11 pages) by Steve Ditko. The myth-orientated bits are the best, with the interesting revelation that Valhalla, Heaven, Asgard and Olympus are the same place -- we even get a Thor and an Odin thrown in. Would Athena really say "Could be, Aphrodite"?

Nice stuff, certainly much better than the disappointing Superman Spectacular. Give this one a try! -Laurence Bowkett

WHAT IF #6 (December)
"What If the Fantastic Four Had Different Super-Powers" by Roy Thomas, Jim Craig & Rick Hoberg

Up to now I've tended to avoid Marvel's alternate universe title (the only one, if we discount Warlock's Counter-Earth, which was part of the Marvel Universe as we know it), but I actually found the alternate-FF as interesting as -- almost preferable to -- the originals.

Why? Well, the reason I bought the FF back in the Sixties, and still do, is characterisation -- and this incarnation brings out new facets of the foursome. As Dragonfly, Ben Grimm evades self-pity and the Thing's cynical outlook on life. Given the powers of our Reed, Sue Storm takes on the identity of Ultra-Woman (emphasis mine, and anyone who isn't 100% MCP will grasp my reasons). Johnny Storm as Mandroid is again interesting; his powers are similar to Ben Boxer in KAMANDI, only Johnny's permanently affected. As for Reed, his ability to command the others repeats itself--but the alternate Earth's cosmic rays leave him a bodyless brain, "Big Brain" to his team-mates.

My only criticism is in the story's visual continuity. Mandroid loses one of his robotic arms in a fight with Dr Doom, who himself has a glove vapourised -- yet both have been miraculously restored to normal by the final panel. Apart from that, the whole strip is excellent.

My regret is that the alternate-FF have had their chance, never to return--but I have the answer: it can fit into the Marvel Universe. The FF strip has already accepted the existence of two other Earths (re: 'Cosmic Nexus' series), so why not assume that at least one of them has a Counter-Earth like our own?

It's too good an idea to waste.

-Steven J. Green

TEEN TITANS #53 (February)
"In the Beginning" by Bob Rozakis, Juan Ortiz & John Fuller

Never thought I'd be sad to see the end of the TT. Not that I'm sorry, you understand--it had to happen sometime (even DC sidekicks have got to grow up eventually), and it might as well be now, while a couple of them have got their own strips elsewhere (I hate it when characters are just cast into limbo...).

And it was a good send-off, in its way. Granted, the menace in the origin story was feeble to the point of unbelievability, but the founding and the disbanding made a nice balance.

And the wind-up on the letters page was open and considered, and...oh, call me sentimental, but I really was quite sad.

Now that's the way to end a mag. -KW

SKY-WOOD #2 (Late 1977)
Available for a 7p stamp from Donald Barr & Mark McKenzie

The second issue of this photocopied fanzine is a great improvement on the first. With an illustrated poem/story which I can't quite classify by Donald Barr, and a 5-page "King Arthur" comic strip by Mark McKenzie, this zine is a hit -- my only complaint is that the 13th page was messy and pointless. Still, 12 out of 13 isn't bad, and you haven't got anything to lose! -Jonathan Rogers

WILLY THE KID BOOK 2 (1978)
£1, published by Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd; written & drawn by Leo Baxendale

The name of Leo Baxendale is probably unfamiliar to many people, because he is one of the breed of British comic artists that have remained anonymous through more or less his whole career. But, Baxendale is none other than the creator of the Bash Street Kids, Minnie the Minx, Little Plum, and many other popular British comic characters he worked on from 1953 to 1975.

Last year, Leo decided to create a marvellous little character called Willy the Kid, and gave him his own book using all the techniques that had made his style famous throughout the years spent on the Beano, such as the arrows pointing to the characters stating their current moods.

This year he's followed it up, quite logically, with Willy the Kid Book Two, featuring more adventures of Willy with his dog, Kojak, and his pet mouse, called Frankenstein -- the book has a 'childish' feel to it, but is fresh, and truly humorous in its approach.

I remember Baxendale's art from my early British comic days, and believe me when I say that this book is a must for anyone interested in gazing at superbly funny artwork of an unpretentious kind.

-Jan Garczynski

GODZILLA #8 (March)
"Titan Times Two" by Doug Moench, Herb Trimpe, and Fred Kida

Er, yes, well...

Um, pretty much what you'd expect in the circumstances. Er...I don't really know what else I can say; if anything is ever going to happen in this mag, I'm damned if I know what.

I used to think Hulk was just about the epitome of stuck-in-a-rut-ness, but this mag's got it beat by miles. -K. Williams

SHOWCASE #97 (February)
"Power Girl" by Levitz, Staton & Orlando

Great! Fabulous! Brilliant! Lovely! If you can bring yourself to tear your eyes from the superb Staton/Orlando cover, and venture within, you find yourself in the first solo adventure of the greatest ever superheroine.

The script is excellent. It does, of course, suffer from being a bit introductory and explanatory, as do all first issues or appearances, but it has plenty to be going on with. The visuals are a very definite case of "Red Sonja eat your heart out". This has assuaged my fears that "The New Doom Patrol" were a sign of things to come -- with tales like this, SHOWCASE deserves its new monthly status, a million times over. -Jonathan Rogers

VAMPIRELLA #66 (January)

We start with the usual type of Enrich cover, featuring Vampi locked in combat with the half-human/half-feline Pantha--like the contents, it's perhaps the weakest of this month's three Warren titles. It's tending this time to concentrate on simple mystery tales instead of the more interesting psychological dramas prevalent in earlier times--also, this issue sees the conclusion of the 7 stories started last time, Warren experimenting by letting readers guess the endings, with a chance to appear in the forthcoming Vampirella film going to the winner. I found the answers even more contrived than the stories, and in the main unsatisfactory--I hope this is one experiment that will fail, I prefer the straightforward stories of the past. Even Vampi herself is suffering from an apparent lack of direction in Bill DuBay's plotting. Although this is a familiar cry, I wish we could go back to the plots of 1972. -Mike Grace

2000 A.D. prog 41 (3 Dec 77)

JUDGE DREDD by John Howard and Brian Bolland, concluding the "Mega-City 5000" story. With only two racers left on both the Spacers and the Muties sides, things start heating up. Just look at the art! Brian has really done a great job here, becoming my favourite Dredd artist, in a tie with Ian Gibson.

INVASION by Gerry Finley-Day and Carlos Pino is the usual thump-bang-wallop-the-Volgs story, with Savage still trying to get the British heir to safety. The script isn't bad, but the strip needs a continuing storyline and a better artist (maybe Mike Dorey) if it's to succeed with me.

BONJO FROM BEYOND THE STARS -- Huh? Kev O'Neill must've been seeing too many Godzilla films. It's amusing, and different from the other features--that's a fact!

THARG'S FUTURE-SHOCKS: "The Runts" by Steve Moore & Pat Wright. A nice, heart-warming story about rat-like creatures who, almost--overrun the Earth!? Seriously though, it's a well-written job, with some of the best art ever seen in this comic.

DAN DARE by Gerry Finley-Day and Dave Gibbons. Another good episode in the ongoing attempts of Dan and crew to defeat Klingon lookalikes, the Starslayers, with great Gibbons art, maintaining the high standard of the series.

MACH 1 by Alan Hebden, Lozano & Canos. This latest "Death Ray" story shows the author's prejudice against the Russians, but is still pretty good. Probe doing something without his boss knowing is different--but could prove dangerous for him, judging from the previous episode. The art is improving steadily.

INFERNO by Tom Tully and Belardinelli. Giant, Zack and Slim's frame-up has been discovered--but that makes little difference to the citizens who bet their money on the Wolves. Now the former Heroes have to rebuild their Inferno team -- and it's gonna be interesting to see how they'll do it! The art is still the excellent work we've come to expect from Belardinelli.

The cover, which I presume was by Ewins and McCarthy, was fine, too. Overall, my opinion on this comic is that it is the best one being published in the British Isles. Its quality of material is high, and it's cheap, too! Only 9p. A bit of friendly advice: BUY IT! -Ken Moore

MADE IN BRITAIN

One of the nicest items to appear since last time, and which could just as easily be covered by Al Matheson or Ed Sallis, is COMIX INDEX, compiled by Mal Burns--it's 75p from most specialist shops, or if in difficulty contact Mal.

It's an index to, and a well-illustrated history of, underground comix in Britain, and it's fascinating--even fanzines with 60% or more graphic content are included, letting in YANCY STREET JOURNAL and UGG-ROTTEN COMIX, even if the data on that last zine is almost entirely wrong. So, there are errors--and there are bound to be omissions too, but who's quibbling? There's a wide variety of art by everyone appropriate, including Nick Neocleous, Hunt Emerson, Bryan Talbot and Harry McAvinchey, and it's obviously a labour of love. Take a look!

I've talked about various comic albums in Bem recently -- somewhere near ASTERIX in your bookshop you may come across the LUCKY LUKE series by Goscinny & Morris, a more humorous approach to the Wild West than "Fort Navajo" ("Jesse James", "The Stage Coach", "The Tenderfoot", "Dalton City", and "Western Circus" are the only ones translated into English), IZNOGOUD, Arabian Nights-type fun by Goscinny and Tabary (translated by Anthea Bell & Derek Hockridge, fresh from their fine work on Asterix--"Iznogoud on Holiday" & "Iznogoud the Infamous" are the only two so far), OMPA-PA, redskins and redcoats co-existing quite nicely by Goscinny and Uderzo (but translated by Nicholas Fry, not Anthea & Derek -- "Ompa-Pa and Brother Two Scalp" introduces the two main characters, while "Ompa-Pa Saves the Day" comes next), and others. The Lucky Lukes have been out for years, but the others were all new in 1977 -- add a series of POPEYE reprints, and three HAGAR albums (by Dik Browne), and it looks as if there's quite a boom going on in this sort of publication!

The latest two of these 11½" by 8½" softcover albums I've tracked down, though, seem to have first appeared in this country in 1975; like so many of these series, they are set in America--but right back when the first Spaniards started to explore the south-west, and told from the point of view of one tribe of Apaches. Hans Kresse is writer & artist--the titles are "Masters of Thunder" and "Riders of the Wind", and while I occasionally found all the tribes and feuds a little complex, I can certainly recommend this original and intriguing series. Nice art, too.

Asterix, Lucky Luke, Fort Navajo, Hagar, Ompa-Pa, Iznogoud, Popeye, Riders of the Wind -- now if only we could see Hodder & Stoughton, Egmont or Methuen publish some original British material in this format! By the way, has anyone got any background information on the TINTIN series, such as which titles are best? I'd like to cover them in this column some time...

On the more mundane level, I expect by the time this Bem appears Marvel's STAR WARS WEEKLY has come out, complete with cardboard press-together "X-fighters" and "Y-fighters" in the first two issues--it makes a change from their useless little plastic aeroplane kits, I suppose. I have heard that RAMPAGE and COMPLETE FANTASTIC FOUR are selling poorly, compared with SUPER SPIDER-MAN and THE MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVEL--too few features per issue is the reason, I'd say. And Marvel's addition to Rampage of Iron Man in an effort to boost sales would seem to back up my opinion! Any bets on a "Super Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four" amalgamation, or something similar, soon?

On the subject of amalgamations, after six issues of the new BATTLE-ACTION joint production from IPC, I could understand if fans of ACTION were feeling betrayed, and starting to drift away. The "Action" half of the title logo is starting to shrink, and the strips taken over from Action have been changed beyond all recognition. The war strip "Hellman" has been moved back from the last days of World War II in Europe to the invasion of France, while "Dredger" had his partner killed in the very first B-A instalment, and with a more military setting is now really just a modern-day version of the strip that he replaced, "Gaunt"--the similarity extends to using the same artist, John Cooper. Also, the futuristic sports strip, "The Spinball Slaves", is now another military operation, "The Spinball Wars".

THE BEM BACK ISSUE BIT!

Still available are Bems 1,3,7,9,10, & 12 to 16 -- over 200 pages of material, including the Captain Frog saga to date (and other Chris Ash strips), "The U.K. Heroine Addict", and assorted articles, comment, strips and fan art. These ten back issues, practically a history of the last four years of fandom (it says here), can be yours for £1.20 -- or any five for 80p. If you're sending in a subscription to Bem (£1 for 4 issues), you can have the 10 back issues as well for a total of £2! Bems 12-16 are also available individually, at 20p each.

Martin Lock.

Now, don't get me wrong, BATTLE-ACTION is a good, exciting paper, and it manages to avoid the old-fashioned clichés of the war comic -- but couldn't a proper, equal partners amalgamation of BATTLE & ACTION have been tried, rather than turning the strips from Action into imitations of the Battle features? I just hope that those Action fans who have been cast adrift are being picked up by 2000 A.D., it would really be a bleak day for British comics if it follows Valiant and Action into the insides of Battle.

Talking of 2000 A.D., you'll have seen the "new look" for 1978 by now I expect; gone are the "supercovers" (which were getting feebler and jokier), and instead Dan Dare takes up his old Eagle position, starting in colour on the front cover. In the middle, with two pages in colour, is Judge Dredd; Invasion and Inferno, plus the occasional Future-Shock, are also on hand, while MACH-1 has been replaced by "The Visible Man", a fellow with transparent skin, starting in prog 47. Hang on in there, Tharg -- you're doing fine!

And just room to mention Dez Skinn's new companion magazine to HOUSE OF HAMMER, STARBURST, a Star Wars cash-in; even less comics than HoH, but it does have the first half of a Jeff Hawk adventure -- 32 daily strips. Oddly, six days are missing from the sequence. 52 pages, including a fine Lewis cover, for 50p. And HoH #16 may only have 9 pages of strip, but 6 of 'em are John Bolton's Father Shandor, so it's still worth 35p. -RUAN LANIHORNE

SIGH

"The Thing We Learn From History is That We Never Learn Anything From History..."

No, I know it isn't the original quotation, but that's the way I first came across it, and I think it's more succinct that way...

I was re-reading Amazing Fantasy #15 the other day (he said casually--actually, to be honest it's only a very tatty reading copy, but what the hey...), and I was rather struck by the 'Fan Page' therein.

It was devoted to an "Important Announcement From The Editor" (this obviously was before Stan Lee became STAN LEE!), which went as follows -- and here I quote verbatim (they can't touch you for it):-

"You will notice that the format of Amazing has been changed. There are a number of reasons for this, and we want to take you, our valued readers, into our confidence.

"We hate to throw in the towel, but we find that it is simply impossible to produce a magazine like Amazing each and every month, containing five highly original and carefully plotted stories, without the quality eventually beginning to suffer. Rather than risk losing your confidence, we have decided to change Amazing in such a way that it will STILL present the finest in fantasy -- but in a different way.

"As you can see, we are introducing one of the most unusual new fantasy characters of all time -- the SPIDERMAN, who will appear every month in Amazing. Perhaps, if your letters request it, we will make his stories even longer, or have TWO Spiderman stories per issue.

"Also we are discontinuing our contents page, as many of you have requested. We feel your point is well taken--you would prefer us to make one of the stories a page longer instead.

"Finally we are omitting the word ADULT from our masthead. A number of our teenage readers have written to say that it makes them feel a bit awkward to buy a magazine which seems to be written exclusively for older readers. We never expected such a reaction, but we certainly don't want to embarrass ANY of our loyal readers.

"And there you have it -- our new editorial policy, and the reasons we have undertaken it. Naturally, we are most anxious to have your opinions, and will be waiting eagerly for your letters. Rest assured that, although it is impossible for us to answer your letters personally, we carefully read each and every one, and are guided by your desires when we edit our magazines!"

Now, okay, it's easy to pick holes in the thing. For a start the changes don't sound by today's standards particularly drastic, certainly not enough to warrant the grand treatment given -- except, of course, with the benefit of hindsight. After all, that bit about Spidey being "the most unusual new fantasy character of all time" is a bit too much to swallow even now, let alone back then. And, too, the writing of the piece is clumsy and vague. Of course hindsight also endows certain aspects with unconscious irony, too; Spidey stories do generally run to a bit longer than 11 pages now.

But all of that is beside the point.

The thing about it that impressed, and even startled, me (not having realised the Fan Page was there before) was that there was apparently more attempt being made to communicate with the fans back then than there is now, in what I tend to think of as the era of fan-power...

I just wonder... I wasn't actually "in at the birth" of Spidey. Could it have been that element, even more than the admittedly-different Lee/Ditko style, that made Spidey? Maybe I'm reaching too far--but I think it's worth thinking about.

What other mags spring to mind as having offered a degree of involvement to the readers? Superman under Weisinger perhaps? (Even if the stories weren't necessarily up to much...) Aquaman under Giordano, JLA and Flash under Schwartz, early FF and X-Men, and a few others. Perhaps not quite the majority of long lived mags.

But look at the other side of the coin. What discontinued mags offered a real sense of involvement? Doom Patrol, yes, and Metal Men I suppose, and Metamorpho in its own way... but that's about all I can think of. And if you look at some of the shorter-lived titles, you can find examples of extreme non-communication and non-involvement; Ragman, Tor, Blitzkrieg.

And I think also there might be here an explanation of the apparent popularity of mags like Witching Hour, which though they don't appear to offer the reader much, do print items on their letters pages sent in by readers...and while, granted, you or I would probably prefer to see our views in print than some un-fascinating clipping or second-hand tale of spooky happenings, if you think about it, it is providing 'material' of a sort for the mag. What more direct involvement could a fan hope for?

But if 'involvement' is the key, or a key factor, there just might be some fundamental mistakes being made now. I dare say you'll have noticed, as I did, the total absence of lettercols from many November Marvels. Once, not so many years ago, Marvel mags had no less than 2 pages of letters each and every (whoops, that phrase is catching) issue.

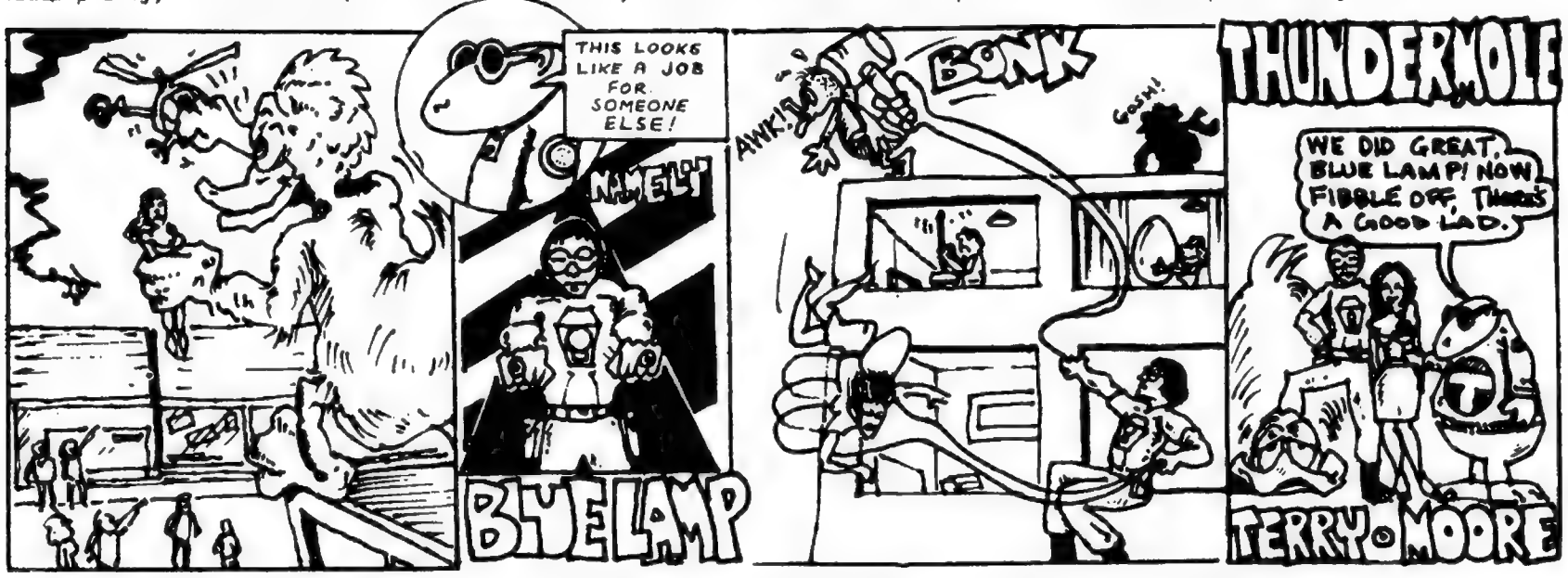
The September Jonah Hex featured a reprint, albeit probably a much-requested one, without either prior warning or subsequent apology; ditto Captain America #216 and FF #189. Most reprints seem to be heralded with just a perfunctory "sorry, the ol' dreaded deadline doom caught us again". Once, if a reprint were allowed to happen there'd be profuse apologies, and promises to try not to let it happen again.

And lettercols generally seem to be once again cultivating the art of the cop-out --more on which at another time and place.

It seems strange, and more than a touch saddening, that at a time when ex-fans constitute a substantial proportion of the writers, artists, editors etc at both DC and Marvel, today's mags seem to be forgetting about the involvement & communication side of things, which may well have been responsible for bringing those (ex?-) fans into the business in the first place, and without which the next generation of fans might just not come to be.

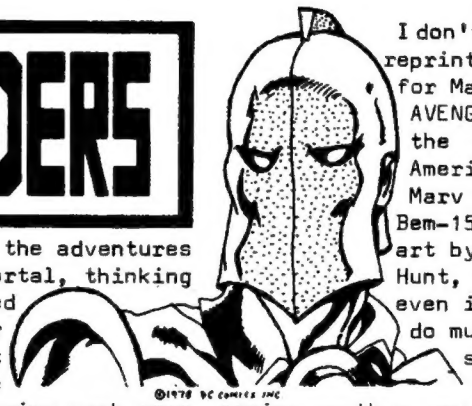
It seems it's left to the fanzines to try and fill the resultant void.

To coin a phrase: Sigh... -K. WILLIAMS



you may think this strip is wacky -- but see next prog, 'cause Blue Lamp's backy!

TALE-ENDERS



If you've been avoiding the adventures of the World's Mightiest Mortal, thinking the book too light-hearted and cartoony, watch out for SHAZAM ≠34 (April)--the art is now by Alan Weiss & Joe Rubinstein, with a style owing much more to Neal Adams than C.C. Beck, and scripter E. Nelson Bridwell is in a darker mood--"The Fuhrer of Chicago" of the title is Captain Nazi, and Captain Marvel's job is not just to capture his old foe--as well as that, he's got to stop Captain Marvel Junior from killing the villain who, back in World War II, crippled him! What fans of Cap will think of this "new look" is an open question -- but there is a re-cap of Junior's origin, and they may be glad to hear that there's only one more issue of this title anyway. After that the Big Red Cheese will take over Wonder Woman's slot in the dollar WORLD'S FINEST.

Similarly, WEIRD WAR TALES ≠61 (March) is different from previous issues--for a start, it sports a fine Chaykin cover, and inside both stories are science fiction; "Mind War" by Roger McKenzie, Chaykin & David Morris, and "The Mercenary" by Bob Kanigher and Alex Nino. Wouldn't it be nice if sales of this sort of issue were good enough to encourage DC to produce an SF anthology title?

SHOWCASE ≠98 continues Power Girl's 3-issue run here, with "When the Symbioship Strikes" by Paul Levitz, Joe Staton & Dick Giordano. At last we learn the details of Kara Zor-L's origin--most intriguing! And Power Girl fights her strangest and most vital battle. I hope DC continue to let her fly solo, preferably in her own book; what fun we could have with Earth-2 back-up features from the Justice Society!

Over on Earth-1, KARATE KID ≠13 (only 2 more issues to go) has KK battling the Legion in "Tomorrow's Battle...Yesterday" by Bob Rozakis, Juan Ortiz & Bob McLeod--to be exact, the "old" LSH from before Karate Kid joined them. It's quite a good issue, and the art now's certainly better than in the Estrada issues--Ric may have an interesting style, but he seems to fit in better on war book back-up features.

BRAVE & BOLD ≠140, with Batman & Wonder Woman involved in "Dastardly Events Aboard The Hellship" by Haney & Aparo, just goes to show how nice it will be to have eight more pages of story to play with soon--a good single-issue tale of intrigue and danger gets mighty cramped in 17 pages! Continued stories, like the saga of BLACK LIGHTNING (≠7, "The Conscience of the Killer" by Isabella, von Eeden & Colletta) don't suffer as badly; the tale certainly is developing nicely here, with a blend of tragedy and triumph--the sort of thing that makes a memorable comic.

DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE ≠2, with another excellent Kaluta cover, has another good supernatural tale, "Blood Red Tear" by Conway & Alcazar--possession & exorcism, complete with green vomit, yet! Madame Xanadu is certainly <u>prettier</u> than Phantom Stranger--will they ever meet, I wonder?

I don't see any Deadline Doom reprints among the Marvels for March--is this a record? AVENGERS ≠169 does use up the Black Panther/Captain America/Iron Man fill-in Marv Wolfman prepared (see Bem-15's news section), with art by Sal Buscema and Dave Hunt, however--it shows that even in 18 pages you can't do much with three stars to spotlight, but it's a darn sight better than seeing another reprint, that's for sure!

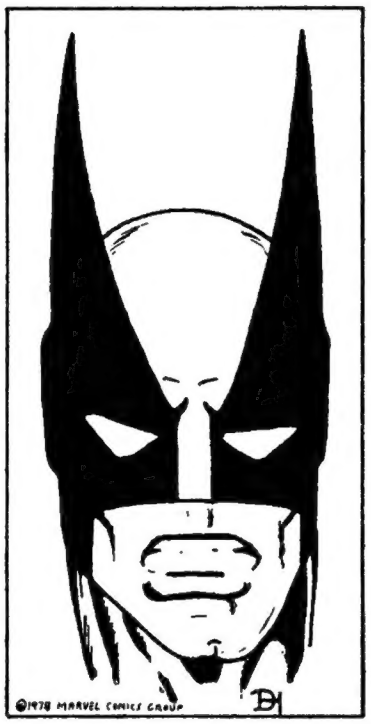
MS MARVEL ≠15 keeps this title moving along its merry way towards a bi-monthly publication schedule; "The Shark Is A Very Deadly Beast" is the title, with Namorita, Tiger Shark, Wundarr, and even Gorgeous Goodwin (!) showing up--it's an enjoyable title, and I hope Chris Claremont (aided this time by Jim Mooney & Tony DeZuniga) can save it. The news that he'll be joined by Dave Cockrum in an effort to re-vamp the character and costume is encouraging!

I'm not sure why just about everyone seems to dislike THE HUMAN FLY--just because he's not a standard superhero in the Marvel mould, people seem to think his book is inferior. Issue 7, "Snow Blind", is another good one-issue tale by Bill Mantlo, along with Lee Elias & Mike Esposito--the Fly's ski-jump is neatly linked with a much more important story of survival and courage, to make a most satisfactory issue.

NOVA ≠18, the second issue not to be imported at 12p, sees the book on a bi-monthly schedule--and in Marvel terms, that means failure! Still, it has been known for books to bounce back... This is an unusual issue, in that it's split into two stories, the 11-page conclusion of the Yellow Claw versus SHIELD free-for-all Nova got recruited into, "The Final Showdown", and a 7-page "Beginnings", devoted to sorting out the private life of Richard Ryder & family--both bits written by Marv Wolfman, with art by Carmine Infantino and the Tribe. Carmine's certainly showing that he's not lost his old flair as an artist; it's just a shame somebody assumed his expertise extended to business management, we lost some years of good art!

MASTER OF KUNG FU ≠62 begins a sequel to the "Cat" story in ≠s 38 & 39; Jim Craig may not be Paul Gulacy, but Doug Moench is still Doug Moench! Anyone who ignores this book because it isn't "original", or because they don't like all those kung fu films that flooded the cinemas a year or five ago, is missing one of Marvel's most interesting books; it isn't at all like Denny O'Neil's limply cliché-ridden work on DC's KUNG FU FIGHTER, honest!

DAREDEVIL ≠151 has ol' DD running about without his mask again (see ≠57) -- he'll have to be careful, a guy could catch a nasty chill that way...



Since there hasn't been room for me to write an editorial this time, or even a "News At Bem", I'd better take some space here to talk about various changes in Bem this time. As I warned you, we've had to put the cover price up to 20p, and the postal price up to 25p -- but we're up to 20 pages now, with more pages of reading, more fan art, a longer lettercol, and more features than in any single issue before. All this and a three-colour cover too!

Besides all our regular contributors, I'd like to thank Mike Higgs for giving Bem our brightest and best cover yet -- I should also thank Phil Clarke for making the arrangements for this. The cover is of course a wrap-around one, with the back half forming an ad for the "Nostalgia & Comics" shop in Birmingham that Phil and his friends run--I can certainly recommend the place, I spend more money there than at any other comic shop. Also, thanks go to Mike Gold of DC for supplying us with news, encouragement, and the larger-than-ever cover reproductions we're using now, and as usual Rich Morrissey and Britain's own Colin Campbell -- issue 64 (January) of his adzine FANTASY ADVERTISER should be available around now for 45p from him at 'Biytoo', Plains Rd, Gt Totham, Maldon, Essex.

Even with the extra space in Bem this time, there hasn't been room for everything I had hoped to include -- I've enough reviews on hand for a third page of Review Section, and "Bird's Eye View", in which Sue Cruden tells us what goes on behind the scenes at a Liverpool comic mart, will have to be held over until next time. Sue's husband, Michael, is in evidence this time, of course -- he's the one answering the letters, between "/(" and ")/", in Reaction. I hope that inserting the answers into the body of the letter, as Mike has been doing in Fantasy Trader in the past, isn't too confusing -- if it is, let us know, but it certainly makes for more direct responses to letters. And a warm welcome into Bem for Fantasy Trader and its readers--what do you think of the zine so far?

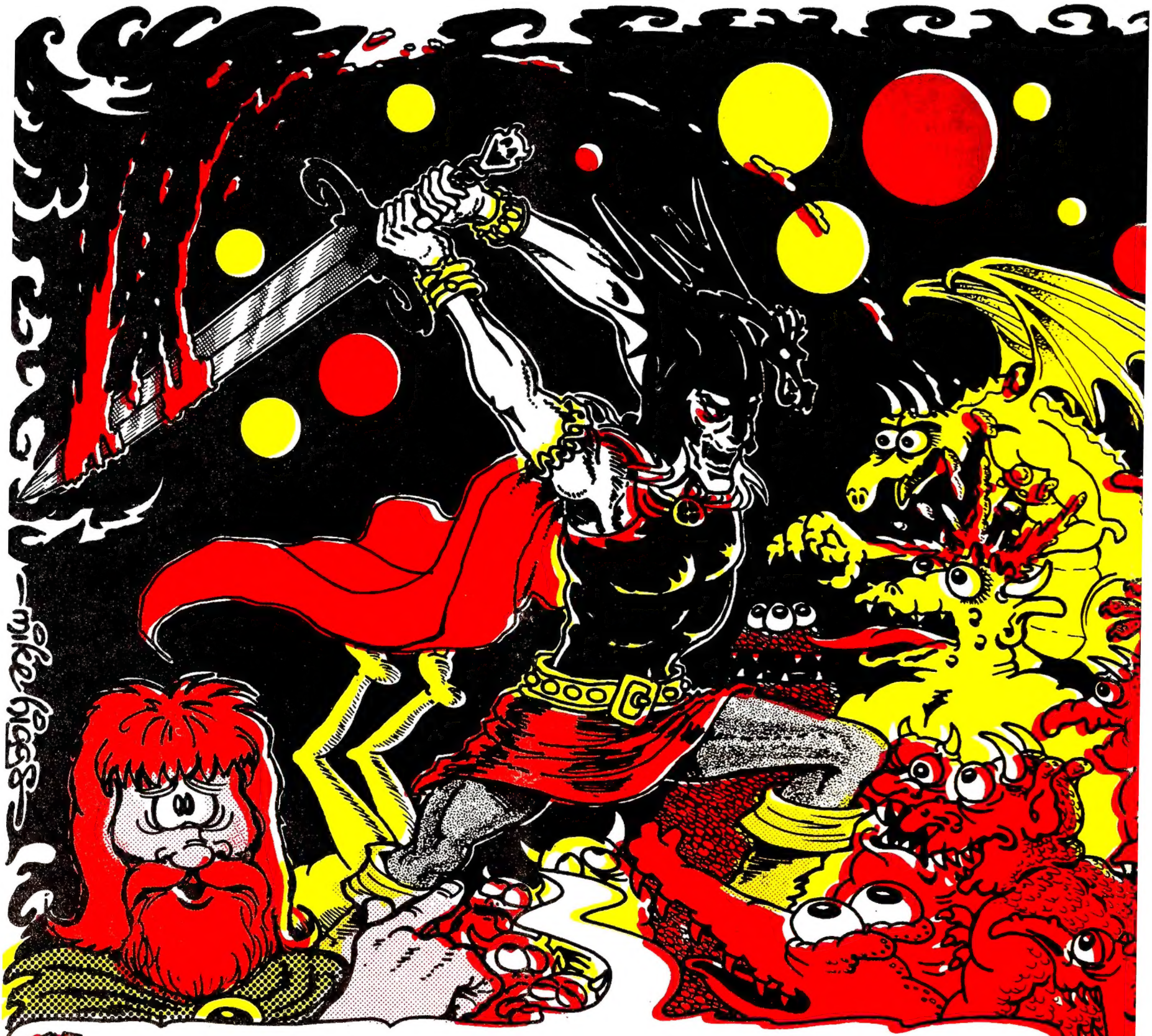
Fantasy Trader is continuing as a free adzine, sent out to all Bem subscribers; yet another excellent reason to subscribe to Bem! FT's circulation is thus as big as it's ever been--and an ad in it ought to get pretty good response! All pages are reduced 33% to fit an A5 page, and a full page (7¼" x 11¼", including margins) costs £2, a half page (7¼" x 5½") £1.10, or a quarter page (3¼" x 5½") 60p; ads should be sent to Mike at 24 George St, Denton, Manchester M34 3DJ--the deadline for the next issue is 21st February.

That's all for now. -MARTIN LOCK

THE NEXT STEP -- SUBSCRIBE TO BEM!

Just send £1 (cheque or postal order, made payable to M. Lock), to us, and the next four issues of Bem will be sent to you fresh off the presses. So stay in touch with fandom -- with Bem!

Martin Lock.

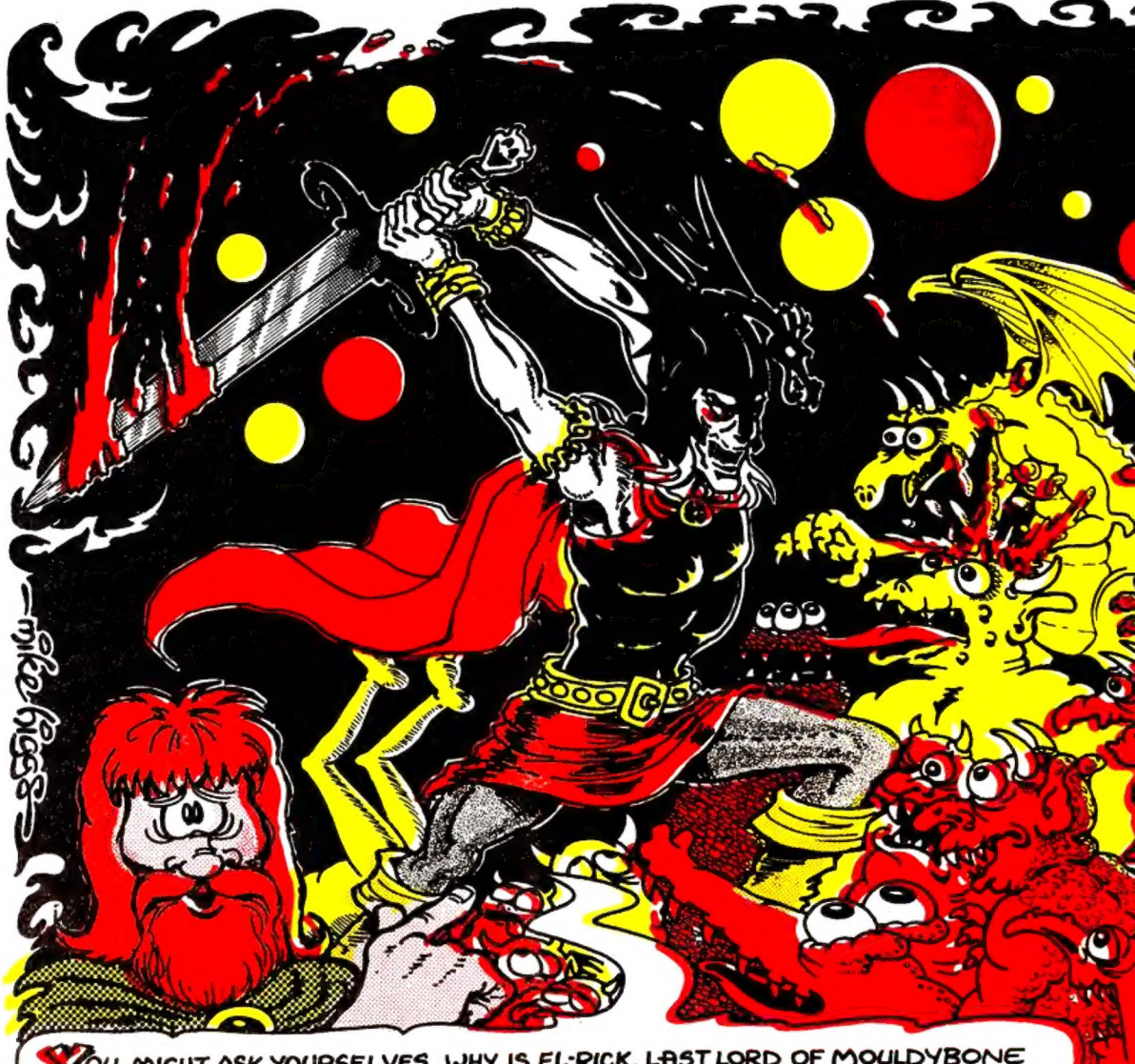


YOU MIGHT ASK YOURSELVES, WHY IS EL-RICK, LAST LORD OF MOULDYBONE BEATING THE HELL OUT OF A HORDE OF CHAOS-SPAWNED DEMONS WITH HIS BLACK RUNESWORD, STORKBRINGER WHEN HE COULD BE BROWSING QUITE HAPPILY THROUGH THE PILES OF NEWLY IMPORTED AND GOLDEN AGE COMICS AT THE NOSTALGIA & COMICS SHOP IN BIRMINGHAM? THE ANSWER IS: EL-RICK IS A RAVING LOONEY! DON'T BE THE SAME, PUT UP YOUR RUNESWORDS AND VISIT....

NOSTALGIA & COMICS

1, HURST STREET and 4,5 & 6 HURST ST. SUBWAY, BIRMINGHAM 5. TEL: 021-643-0143.

EVERYTHING FOR THE COMICS, FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION COLLECTOR.



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COMICS NEWS

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No. 17

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